



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**MILITARY INTERVENTION IN IDENTITY GROUP  
CONFLICTS:  
A SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY PERSPECTIVE ON  
THE SUNNI INSURGENCY IN IRAQ**

by

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December 2006

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A SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY PERSPECTIVE ON THE SUNNI  
INSURGENCY IN IRAQ**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates why Iraq's Sunnis resorted to violent collective action, rather than non-violent political action, following Saddam's overthrow. Using social movement theory, I argue that decreasing political opportunity, existing mobilizing structures with violent repertoires, and effective framing of the opposition as *kufr* (non-Muslim) explain the emergence of Iraq's Sunni insurgency. I posit that Sunnis felt a profound grievance in the decreased political opportunity following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Furthermore, mobilization nearly always utilizes existing networks and adapts the characteristics of the physical spaces and organizational structures from which the movement emerges. I argue that the disbanded military and militant Islamist networks comprised the bulk of the first insurgent groups, and that these groups used their existing repertoires to shape Iraq's political environment. I then trace the frames used throughout the conflict, illustrating that the common theme is opposition to rule by *kufr* – whether it be Coalition nations or Iraqi Shi'a – and this provides a concrete target for the insurgency. Examined collectively, these three factors provide a sufficient explanation for the Sunni insurgents' turn to violence to address their political grievances. This argument stands in contrast to the clash of civilizations and "Cosmic War" arguments, which offer insufficient explanations.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In March 2003, the United States invaded Iraq with the stated goal of removing Saddam Hussein's regime from power. The combat concluded quickly and almost surgically. After major combat operations ended, however, scattered anti-Coalition attacks grew into a full-scale insurgency. Understanding the basic identity and addressing the grievances of the insurgents have proven difficult, however. Attempts to appease one group invariably enrage others, continuing the cycle of attacks on Coalition forces. I investigate why Iraq's Sunnis resorted to violent collective action rather than non-violent political activities following Saddam's overthrow. I narrow the scope by studying only the Sunni identity group and utilize social movement theory (SMT) as the analytical framework.

Why did a large portion of Iraq's Sunni population turn to collective violence for political action? Is this violence explained by a clash of civilizations or religious aversion to representative governance? Do non-religious variables such as diminished political opportunity, particular forms of framing, mobilizing structures and collective action repertoires provide a more sufficient explanation than conventional explanations like religion and culture?

I argue that instead of perennial cultural factors, it was decreasing political opportunity<sup>1</sup>, the existing mobilizing structures<sup>2</sup> containing violent collective repertoires,<sup>3</sup> and effective framing of the opposition as non-Muslims (anti-*kufir* framing)<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I define political opportunity as the structures and conditions, both formal and informal, available to a particular group at a specific point in time.

<sup>2</sup> I define mobilizing structures as the organizations and structures by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action, including manpower, skills and repertoires. These structures are then used to carry out the collective action, and necessarily influence the direction and tone of the activities and outcomes. For more information, see Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> I define repertoires as the set of skills and resources available to a group. For example, non-violent conflict resolution in the political process is in the repertoire of American politicians, whereas the state's conflict resolution process in Iraq often relied solely on the use of force.

that caused the initial Sunni resort to violence. Doug McAdam, et al., made a compelling argument for this framework, which I adapt to explain the Sunni insurgency in Iraq. I conclude that Sunnis felt a profound grievance in the decreased political opportunity following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Existing institutions exacerbated this grievance, since mobilization nearly always makes use of existing networks and adapts the characteristics of the physical spaces and organizational structures from which the movement emerges. I argue that the disbanded military and militant Islamist networks that comprised the bulk of the first insurgent groups used their existing repertoires to shape Iraq's political environment. Frames or the spin of movement slogans added impetus to these factors. I then trace the development of frames throughout the conflict between the Coalition and Iraq's Sunni insurgents, illustrating that the most common theme is opposition to rule by *kufr* or non-believer (whether Coalition or Iraqi Shi'a). This framing provided a concrete target for the insurgency. Collectively, these three factors provide a sufficient explanation for the Sunni insurgents' turn to violence to address their political grievances, while highlighting the historical and contingent nature of that violence.

---

<sup>4</sup> David Snow and Robert Benford define a frame as "an interpretive schema that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment." Quoted in Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, "Introduction: Why Emotions Matter," in *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning and Emotion*, ed. Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper (Boulder: Rowan & Littlefield, 2004), 6.

A *kufr* is a non-Muslim, and many Muslims view rule by a *kufr* over Muslims as un-Islamic. Therefore, many of the frames used by the anti-Coalition forces rely heavily on symbols and images designed to equate any support for Coalition actions with supporting rule by *kufr*. These messages fall into the "anti-*kufr* frame" and have been effective in motivating opposition to the Coalition.

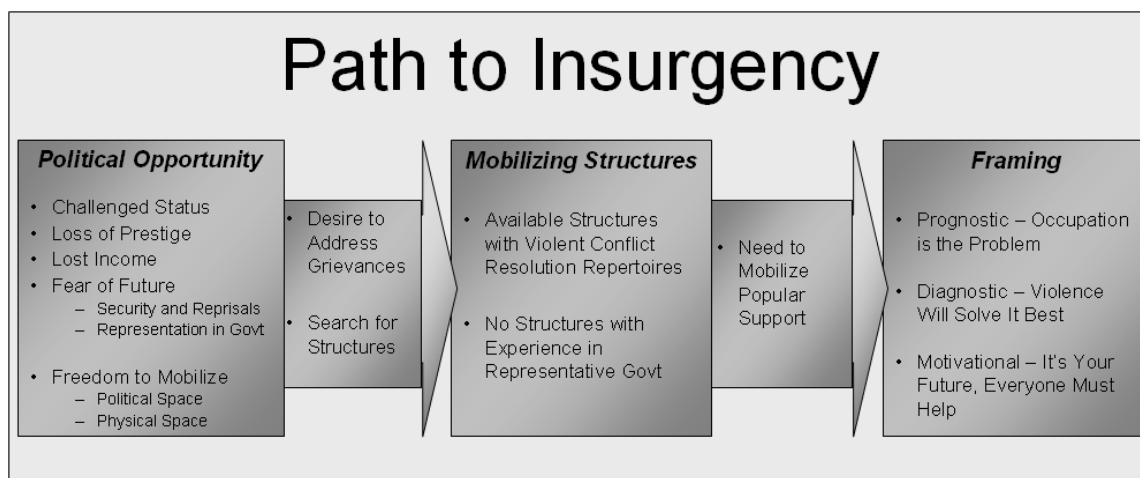


Figure 1. Social Movement Theory and the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq

The alternative explanation argues that Sunni violence is caused by religious motivations. This opposing thesis is characterized by terrorism expert Mark Juergensmeyer's explanation of "Cosmic War." In this perspective, proponents view worldly events in terms of right and wrong, good and evil.<sup>5</sup> Accepting or cooperating with occupation by non-Muslims is seen as irreligious, and fighting the occupiers becomes a religious duty. Bernard Lewis's clash of civilizations<sup>6</sup> falls into this category, as well as the tendency of many Sunnis to dismiss Shi'a political power as rule by non-Muslims. I contend that this is an insufficient explanation. Sunni collective identity is based upon secular concepts as well as the religious differentiation from the Shi'a. Previous positive relationships – and even intermarriage – illustrate that religious divisions cannot cause the current Sunni violence in Iraq, but can certainly exacerbate it. Indeed, none of the works in this category offer a detailed explanation of why secular Sunnis mobilized to violence so quickly.

Studying the Sunni insurgency through the SMT lens provides useful insights into why the insurgents take certain actions, what actions are likely to follow, and even which intervention points possibly provide the best return on investment for the United States.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 149.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Lewis, "Roots of Muslim Rage," *The Atlantic Monthly* (September 1990), <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/90sep/rage.htm> (accessed 7 August 2006). Although Samuel Huntington made this phrase famous with his 1993 article and 1998 book, Bernard Lewis coined the term in 1990.

From an operational and policy perspective, this study helps to identify the roles played by identity groups and social forces in Iraq. Such an understanding may aid the United States in appealing to and integrating moderates, while marginalizing the hardliners whose goals are mutually exclusive with Coalition aims. I distinguish and characterize the insurgents along these lines. From an academic perspective, my analysis contributes to the body of war and social movement literature by providing further insight into military intervention in identity group conflicts. I also address the role of extremist ideologies in social mobilization and political development.

## A. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ian Becket explains that “[i]nsurgency is...a highly political act arising from some sense of grievance, or upon the exploitation and manipulation of grievance.”<sup>7</sup> Social movement theory accepts that such structural explanations are a key foundation for explaining sustained collective action, but a grievance cannot create such action by itself. Therefore, any theory providing causal links for collective action must account for which political grievances are translated into action. In his summary of SMT literature, Doug McAdam explains the three ingredients that establish this causal link: Political Opportunity, Mobilizing Structures and Framing.<sup>8</sup> In general terms, political opportunity explains the grievance and creates the opportunity to mobilize but does not predict the outcome, which could span from widespread collective mobilization to a missed opportunity yielding no collective action. Mobilizing structures are the organizations and resources that provide the means to act. Framing describes a group’s attempt to diagnose the problem, place the blame on a responsible party, and motivate a support base to address the grievance. Taken together, these three ideas establish a causal link between a political grievance and collective action.

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<sup>7</sup> Ian F.W. Becket, *Insurgency in Iraq: An Historical Perspective* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, January 2005), <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?PubID=592> (accessed June 11, 2006), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, “Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Framing Processes – Toward a Synthetic, Comparative Perspective on Social Movements,” in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framing*, ed. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3.

Turning to political opportunity, Doug McAdam, et al., explain that political opportunity analyzed through the work of Charles Tilly (1978), Doug McAdam (1982), and Sidney Tarrow (1983) firmly establishes the link between institutionalized politics and social movements.<sup>9</sup> At that time, Americans were attempting to explain the emergence of social movements based on changes in a system's structure, but Europeans were trying to account for the success or failure of a movement through differences in political characteristics of a nation state. Combining these frameworks, this thesis addresses both why the Iraqi insurgency arose and what political conditions allowed it to organize and operate.<sup>10</sup> The removal of Saddam's regime provided a range of political grievances, and the lack of control over the physical and political spaces in Iraq allowed the insurgents to mobilize.

The two most common criteria for categorization of political grievances and goals for protest in Iraq are secular versus Islamist and indigenous versus transnational, although none of the literature reviewed specifically used these categories to provide a complete picture of the Sunni insurgent groups. Using these criteria, the groups can be described as indigenous secularists, transnational secularists, indigenous Islamists and transnational Islamists. Every major Sunni insurgent group in Iraq fits into one of these categories.

Indigenous secularists include any homegrown Iraqi groups that have non-religious motivations and goals, such as former regime loyalists (FRLs), Iraqi nationalists, and Ba'athist restorationists. Ideologues generally have straightforward grievances and goals: anger and frustration over lost status and income, fear of Shi'a supremacy in the new government, and a desire to protect Sunni interests or return to a Sunni-dominated power structure in Iraq. Transnational secularists include two subsets: criminals and agents of foreign nations. Members of this group are generally not involved in insurgent operations, but support the insurgents by providing supplies and funds. Although the majority of insurgents and most of the support for the insurgency appear to be secular in orientation, Islamist extremists seem to capture most of the

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<sup>9</sup> McAdam, et al., 3.

<sup>10</sup> I define political opportunity as the structures and conditions, both formal and informal, available to a particular group at a specific point in time.

mainstream media's attention. In Iraq, Islamist militants can be divided into those indigenous to Iraq and transnational Islamists. The most radical of the Islamists decry apostate regimes and see democracy as an affront to God's sovereignty, while moderate Islamists may be drawn into a representative government if assured that this government will operate in accordance with the Qur'an. Organizing Iraq's insurgents into these four groups will allow an effective counterstrategy to be more easily created; each group is treated with more precision in later chapters.

To summarize political opportunities in Iraq, the literature varies from macro-level explanations of the causes of instability to very detailed descriptions of how structural concerns affect insurgent perceptions of political opportunity in Iraq's Sunni insurgency. Generally, this literature can be divided into two groups: Structural, which focuses on the relationship between violence and political and economic grievances, such as inequality, unemployment, poverty, or lack of democracy;<sup>11</sup> and cultural, which focuses on the difference between the values and beliefs of terrorists and their targets.<sup>12</sup> Social movement theory provides a model that blends these two approaches, asserting that political opportunity is only one aspect that aids in establishing the causal and procedural links between political grievances and violent collective action.

Drawing on Tilly, I define mobilizing structures as the organizations and structures by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action, including manpower, skills and repertoires.<sup>13</sup> These structures are then used to carry out the collective action, and necessarily influence the direction and tone of the activities and outcomes. The literature illuminates similarities and differences in how various authors analyze the insurgency and categorize its groups, including level of aggregation, criteria for grouping, and possibility of rapprochement.

First, every author reviewed cautioned readers about the accuracy of such categories, given the disparate nature of the groups' memberships, origins and goals. This highlights an important discrepancy in the body of literature that directly affects each analyst's categories: What is the appropriate level of aggregation for the groupings?

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<sup>11</sup> Proponents include Charles Tilly, Ian Lustic, Erica Chenoweth, and Michael Mousseau.

<sup>12</sup> Proponents include Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Tilly. *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 7.

Cordesman reflects a popular opinion that not enough information is available for more than a cursory grouping into two broad categories for the entire insurgency. Presumably for him the Sunni and Shi'a division is self-evident. Baram adds subdivisions within his two major groupings, plus a third category for more precision. Mark Steliga attempts to provide the most precision by dividing the Sunni insurgents into four groups.

Secondly, little agreement exists over what criteria should differentiate the categories. Cordesman's simple categories distinguish between secular and Islamist, as most of the writing on this topic does, while Baram adds an additional level of detail by separating the tribes from either section and breaks out moderates and radicals from ultraradicals. Steliga's categories for Sunni insurgents are based on origin and goals (tribal affiliation or former regime), and ideology (Islamists and nationalists).

Finally, most categories implicitly address the issue of rapprochement. Baram formally includes it as a separate method of categorization, but even Cordesman addresses the issue. Most authors generally agree that transnational Islamists have no interest in cooperating with the government, but many secular insurgent groups can be readily co-opted if the governing structure protects their perceived interests. Interestingly, this division seems to have the most policy saliency but receives the least emphasis in the literature.

Political grievances and mobilizing structures are necessary conditions for sustained social movements, but these do not explain *why* individuals mobilize to collective action. The concept of frames and framing offers one explanation. Frames diagnose the problem, place the blame on a target group, and motivate individuals to action. In this section, I review the literature on framing in the insurgency.

The literature exploring framing in the current Iraqi conflict is rather sparse, and not much agreement exists on how the frames should be categorized. Three authors provide a representative sample of the current state of literature on this topic. First, Amatzia Baram divides the insurgents into groups based upon goals or motivations, such as secularists/ideologues, which include former Ba'athists, Saddam loyalists, and Arab

nationalists; tribes; and Islamists from moderate to ultra-radical.<sup>14</sup> While he does not directly categorize frames, Baram discusses what appear to be framesets based upon the insurgents' ideological motivations. This categorization provides a useful congruence between the organization of insurgent groups and many of the messages proliferating from movements in Iraq.

In one of the few works dealing directly with framing in the Iraqi insurgency, Timothy Haugh defines categories based upon the subject attacked in the message. He claims that the overarching frame is anti-Coalition, calling for expelling the Coalition for many reasons, including patriotism, pan-Arabism or Islamism. The anti-Iraqi government frame follows close behind, and generally includes statements to decredential the Iraqi government and encourage individuals to actively oppose the new form of government. The less common anti-collaboration frame discourages any cooperation with the government, and often claims that the penalty for collaborators is death.<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, Anthony Cordesman divides the Sunni insurgents into two simple groups: the native Iraqi Sunni insurgents, who are mainly nationalists or tribal fighters concerned mostly with influencing the power structure that will govern them, and the "neo-Salafi" Islamists who are engaged in a regional or global war to implement a puritan Sunni state.<sup>16</sup> Cordesman appears to believe that since nearly all of the statements in question are anti-Coalition, the messages coming from Iraq should be generally categorized based upon motivations. Religiously motivated messages fall into one group and most other messages are in a secular category combining issues such as tribalism, pan-Arabism and Iraqi nationalism. The themes of these messages are very similar and further disaggregation is unnecessary.

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<sup>14</sup> Amatzia Baram, *Who Are the Insurgents: Sunni Arab Rebels in Iraq*, (US Institute of Peace, April 2005), <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr134.html> (accessed 11 June 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Haugh, Maj, USAF, "Analysis of Sunni-Based Opposition in Iraq," *Strategic Insights* 4, issue 5 (May 2005), <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2005/May/haughSunniMay05.asp> (accessed 11 June 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, "Zarqawi's Death: Temporary "Victory" or Lasting Impact" (Working draft, Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 8 June 2006), 5.



These three methods of grouping based on goals, subject or origin reflect the general agreement in the literature that the main theme of messages released by Sunni insurgent groups is anti-Coalition. Beyond this, however, the literature differs on categorizing by content, ideology or the message's source. Additionally, while the authors may admit that frames must resonate with the target's identity to be effective, the categories do not address any collective identity beyond current goals or membership in a particular political organization.

After studying the history of the Sunni identity and reconciling this with the messages released by Iraq's Sunni insurgent groups, I submit three new framing categories that provide both organization and historical perspective to the current debate: foreign occupation, army as arbiter of politics, and worldly power as a symbol of God's favor. These frames reflect the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames outlined by Snow and Benford, with which insurgents diagnose the problem as occupation, propose a solution that justifies violence, and motivates individuals to participate. The frames resonate with the population only because they tap into the collective Sunni identity.

In conclusion, literature on social movement theory and writings on the insurgency in Iraq could fill volumes, but few authors attempt to definitively reconcile theory with the current conflict. Taken individually, political opportunity writings are present in nearly every discipline of political science, but not all effectively link grievances to collective action. The writings relating this topic to Iraq are generic and unexciting; this likely reflects the general consensus that Sunni grievances are structural, citing the power lost with Saddam's fall, or cultural, such as the clash of civilizations arguments. Still fewer works attempt to trace the connection between Sunni grievances and collective action with more precision than the recognition that they had grievances to be addressed. None offer an in-depth discussion on why secular Sunnis chose violence to express their political opposition.

The works that connect grievances to action generally use some form of SMT to do so, and framing plays an important role in this process. These writings were

long on theory but short on data and application to Iraq. More research is required to bridge the gap between theory and reality.

Most of the SMT-relevant literature about Iraq's insurgency involves various forms of mobilizing structures, generally in an attempt to describe and explain the insurgent organizations in order to defeat them. Many give a passing nod to addressing the causes but generally discuss casualty figures, tactics and techniques, or membership/identity aspects. Little research attempts to draw causal links between grievances, structures and ending the conflict.

Overall, the large body of literature on the Iraqi insurgency lacks a synthesis to reconcile "facts on the ground" with theoretical constructs such as social movement theory. This is difficult because the insurgency progresses quickly and accurate data is hard to obtain, but the time has come to put this situation in a larger context and go beyond how loss of status angers Sunnis. My thesis addresses this gap by arguing that decreasing political opportunity, effective anti-*kufri* framing, and existing mobilizing structures caused the Sunnis to resort to violence so quickly. Recognizing these lessons may highlight new intervention points that can bring an end to the violence in Iraq. The future of Iraq depends not only upon addressing political grievances of the population, but also upon the insurgents' ability to frame the issues in such a way that the population is motivated to participate in high-risk, violent collective action.

## **B. ROADMAP FOR THIS THESIS**

Chapter II explores the construction of the Sunni Arab identity and its role throughout Iraq's history, and posits that this identity is a critical issue in understanding the Iraqi conflict. I demonstrate that despite Sunni claims that the Sunni-Shi'a split is based upon religious foundations, the identity actually rests as much on the concepts of geography, governing practices and shared historical memory as any religious differences.

Chapter III explains the importance of political opportunity, and how loyalty to identity groups increases, becoming "us versus them" when political opportunity is threatened. I argue that Iraq's Sunni Arabs suffered a tremendous loss of political power

relative to Iraq's Shi'a following Saddam's overthrow. Since this loss was keenly felt by the Sunnis, the struggle took the tone of Sunni versus Shi'a and accentuated the religious aspect of the division.

Much of the SMT literature claims that social movements tap into existing networks for mobilization, rather than attempting to build their own networks from ground zero. In Chapter IV, I apply this theory to Iraq by examining the networks that the Sunni insurgents utilized for their operations. I pay special attention to the disbanded military, which not only provided manpower, organization and hierarchy, but also the arms and equipment to resist the Coalition and Shi'a. I also include militant Islamism with a short discussion on foreign influence. I argue that the Sunnis' adoption of these two networks for their mobilization largely accounts for the Sunni decision to turn to violence, and also speaks to the speed with which the violence appeared. Furthermore, because of Iraq's history, many Iraqis do not have the skills needed for non-violent conflict resolution; the fact that they only had violent repertoires available to them, coupled with the structures used for mobilization, greatly impacted the mobilization towards violence.

Chapter V analyses the role of frames and Sunni framing contests. I begin by examining some historical frames used by Iraq's Sunni Arabs and explore why these frames resonate with the collective Sunni identity. Then, I apply these lessons to frames currently in use by Sunni insurgents. I argue that the overarching theme of Sunni framing attempts is anti-*kufr*. For both anti-Coalition and anti-Shi'a frames, this takes the form of aversion to rule by non-Muslims. In addition, this anti-*kufr* frame often spills over into frames calling for general opposition to occupation forces.

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## **II. SUNNI COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN IRAQ**

What role does identity play in violent social movements, and what creates this identity? What impact does it have upon an individual's calculus to engage in high-risk collective action like the current Sunni insurgency? First and foremost, individuals base their decisions on a perception of "who they are" and this affects the US's ability to resolve the conflict. In Iraq today, for example, the composition and procedures of the new government are being drafted based on fair representation for Sunnis, Shi'a and Kurds, and the threat of full-scale civil war between two of these identity groups looms on the horizon. Clearly, understanding the historical foundations for these identities will aid in addressing grievances to promote stability for Iraq. In this chapter, I show that the Sunni identity is based on many secular factors in addition to the religious distinctions, regardless of claims by Islamist insurgents and many authors describing the conflict as fundamentally religious in nature.

### **A. THE THEORY OF IDENTITY**

What is identity? Unfortunately, identity is an important but amorphous concept that remains largely undefined. Describing the characteristics of identity seems much easier than creating an all-encompassing definition. Ascriptive terms like birthplace, sex and religion inform identity calculations, but Jillian Schwedler posits that practice can have a more forceful impact than inherited traits, especially regarding religion.<sup>17</sup> For this thesis, I use Schwedler's approach to identity as a construction based on processes:

Identity is indeed how individuals and groups define themselves and their relations to others. But it is not a fixed set of characteristics; it is instead the product of historical processes and experiences through which individuals and groups come to see themselves, their place in the world, and their relationships with those around them.<sup>18</sup>

This approach necessarily requires that identity be constructed through experiences, but what types of experiences create or alter identity? Construction takes place through

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<sup>17</sup> Jillian Schwedler, "Islamic Identity: Myth, Menace or Mobilizer," *SAIS Review, A Journal of International Affairs* 21, no. 2, Summer-Fall (2001): 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

significant events, especially crises, and through public debate as state and non-state actors vie for influence over the identity. This struggle often takes place in the popular media and sometimes in the form of ideological debates over which ideas the individual should internalize. Schwedler also explains that identity is partially “based on one’s location within complex sets of social relations, with different identities varying in prominence from one situation to another.”<sup>19</sup> For example, an Arab may emphasize his role as head of household at one moment, then as a son or husband shortly thereafter, while maintaining his identity of good Muslim to guide his actions in both situations.

In addition to personal identity, individuals often partake in various collective identities that are also internalized to guide their thoughts and actions. William Gamson explains that collective identities are generally based in culture and are observable manifestations of thought and behavior:

We know a collective identity through the cultural icons and artifacts displayed by those who embrace it. It is manifested in styles of dress, language, and demeanor. Collective identity need not be treated as some mysterious intangible but can be as empirically observable as a T-shirt or haircut. To measure it, one would ask people about the meaning of labels and other cultural symbols, not about their own personal identity.<sup>20</sup>

Collective identities fundamentally alter an individual’s decision process by providing a lens through which to view the world and by providing scales of value in addition to the variables identified in realist calculations of cost and benefit. Moreover, loyalty to a collective identity can encourage behaviors even if the cost-benefit analysis does not favor the individual adopting that behavior, such as a soldier dying for his country.<sup>21</sup> This argument does not deny that social activists engage in rational cost-benefit analysis, but that “any strategic paradigm necessarily presupposes a theory of identity. Assumptions about social identity are implicit.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, people act rationally only in the context of their personal relationships and values.

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<sup>19</sup> Schwedler, 4.

<sup>20</sup> William Gamson, “The Social Psychology of Collective Action” in *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 60.

<sup>21</sup> Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, “Introduction: Why Emotions Matter,” in *Rethinking Social Movements: Structure, Meaning and Emotion*, ed. Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper (Boulder: Rowan & Littlefield, 2004), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Gamson, 59.

Raphael Patai begins his explanation of Arab identity with a simple explanation of concentric circles, noting that loyalty ties are strongest in the first circle and lessen as identity radiates outwards. His model includes three circles beginning with Islam as the outermost, Middle East as the middle, and Arabs as the closest and most salient identity factor.<sup>23</sup> Noted regional scholar Bernard Lewis utilizes the same model but disagrees on the content:

The first is blood, that is to say, in ascending order, the family, the clan, the tribe, developing into an ethnic nation. The second is by place....This may mean the village or neighborhood, district or quarter, province or city....The third...is the religious community....For many, religion is the only loyalty that transcends local and immediate bonds.<sup>24</sup>

Critics of Patai and Lewis question the notion of pan-Arabism and have noted that Arabs often use the identity concept of “Arab” and “Islam” interchangeably. These critics reject claims of monolithic identities and attempt to break identity into smaller units to study.

## **B. SUNNI COLLECTIVE IDENTITY**

Narrowing down the Arab identity, then, how is the Iraqi Sunni identity constructed? Understanding that even this unit can be broken into smaller components, it still retains identifiable traits that would qualify it as a recognizable identity group. Given this position, what key historical developments led to the Sunni identity prevalent in Iraq today? Several factors combine to construct a Sunni identity that has coalesced into a firm, though not unyielding social fact that affects nearly every aspect of a Sunni’s life in Iraq. In this section, I discuss how religious divisions, geography, the governing policies of colonial and indigenous regimes, and a shared historical memory impact the Sunni narrative.

It remains important to note, however, that Iraq is not necessarily a society divided. As Faleh Jabar explains,

Neither Shi’is nor Sunnis form a monolithic bloc imbued with a sectarian sense of unity of action and perception. Sunnis and Shi’is are divided into modern classes (business class, middle class, peasants, landlords, and

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<sup>23</sup> Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1976), 9-10.

<sup>24</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988), 6.

others) and traditional status groups (nobles, clerics, tribal chieftains, and others), with sundry ideological and hierarchical (familial or tribal) fracture lines dividing these imagined sectarian 'communities.'<sup>25</sup>

While boundaries do exist in Iraqi society, individuals frequently cross them in order to do business with, socially interact with, and even marry individuals from other groups. Contrary to the prevailing atmosphere in popular Western media, Sunni-Shi'a intermarriage is common even in Baghdad, in the heart of the Sunni Triangle.

## **1. Religion**

At the most basic level, the distinction between Sunni and Shi'a is a religious one beginning with the death of the Prophet. The Shi'a believe that Muhammad designated his son-in-law Ali to succeed him as leader of Islam and that the caliphate should pass down Muhammad's hereditary lineage, while the Sunnis do not believe that Muhammad appointed a successor but created processes for appointing or electing the caliph. This disagreement immediately became a power struggle for legitimate leadership in the religion, and eventually spawned differences over practice, theology and identity. Notwithstanding theological factors, one major aspect of this split is the structure of authority and reliance on clergy. While the Shi'a rely heavily on a hierarchical structure for religious concerns, Sunnis believe that an individual's relationship with God is direct and requires no intermediaries. For this reason, the Sunni religious organization tends to be decentralized and autonomous, and Sunnis can choose desirable aspects from various *ulama* rather than depending on a single *marja* to emulate.

Beyond the basic identity of being a Muslim, fundamentalist groups have occasionally influenced the debate over identity in Iraq. Even though Saddam was a secular ruler, for example, he allowed Islam to regain some influence over Iraqis' identities during the last decade of his rule. At this point, many young Iraqi men thought that the Ba'ath Party had lost its ideological coherence and eschewed the Party's original ideas in search of an alternate belief system. Since the sanctions had partially removed Saddam's ability to maintain his grip on the mosques, mosques "were the only institution,

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<sup>25</sup> Faleh A. Jabar, "Postconflict Iraq A Race for Stability, Reconstruction, and Legitimacy," *Special Report* 120, (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, May 2004), <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr120.pdf> (accessed 22 October 2006), 9.



apart from the tribes, relatively immune to regime and party control. They became the natural place for people in search of an alternative to the Ba'th to pass their free time.”<sup>26</sup> To a large degree, this resulted from Saddam's destruction of Iraq's civil society. With no viable social networks besides the Party, Iraqis had few options for alternative expression and the mosque welcomed them into the Islamic social network. As Ayyash al-Kubaysi of the Muslim Ulema Council explains, the mosque basically reared many of Iraq's young men.<sup>27</sup>

From a social movement theory perspective, mosques provided mobilizing space, offering psychological and physical space for religious men to organize and to discuss religious ideas in more depth than simply attending Friday prayers. In any identity, such mobilizing spaces impart specific characteristics to the construction.<sup>28</sup> For example, young Iraqis creating social networks at Ba'ath Party functions will absorb different traits into their identities than Iraqis gathering in mosques, regardless of the views of the individuals involved. Since the mosque was the only alternative to the Party available to these Iraqis, they mobilized under the rubric and in the mobilizing spaces of Islam. This phenomenon can give strength to the identity that extends beyond the movement and partially explains why some Sunnis simply found refuge in Islam and others turned to fundamentalist Islam. During this time, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood began spreading its philosophy in Iraq's mosques. Al-Kubaysi claims that underground Sunni fundamentalist movements existed during this time, although Baram questions the validity of this assertion.<sup>29</sup> Whether it occurred before or after Saddam's fall, however, fundamentalist Islam worked its way into the collective identity of some Sunnis in Iraq, and a portion of Iraq's insurgents since 2003 claim to be fighting for fundamentalist causes. According to standard Muslim Brotherhood philosophy, these insurgents claim that the source of society's ills is the failure to observe true Islamic practices and prohibit religious innovations. Therefore, the Islamization of Iraqi society is the path to solving society's problems and the goal of these fundamentalists. Although this goal may be

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<sup>26</sup> Baram, *Who Are the Insurgents?*

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> McAdam, et al., 3.

<sup>29</sup> Baram, *Who Are the Insurgents?*

pure, however, the increased Islamization of Iraqi society has not been accompanied by improved security, “partly because the borders between religious militias and criminal gangs are often blurred, even more so when both sides belong to the same tribe.”<sup>30</sup>

## **2. Geography**

In addition to religion, geography and ethnicity played important roles in constructing the Iraqi Sunni identity. The Sunnis are the dominant group in the oft-cited “Sunni Triangle,” roughly encompassing Tikrit in the North, Ramadi in the West, and Baghdad in the East. The Shi’a, which account for approximately 60% of Iraq’s population today, are concentrated in the Southeast portion of the country.<sup>31</sup> The Kurds in the North are a Sunni group with an ethnic stock distinct from the Arabs. This geographic segregation not only caused each group to rely more heavily on its own members for daily interactions, but also allowed government policies to target specific groups, such as when Saddam Hussein began draining Southern Iraq’s marshes in an effort to disrupt the Shi’a lifestyle and economic viability.

During the Ottoman conquest, the Shi’a Safavids repeatedly battled the Ottomans for control over the region, until Sultan Murat IV finally secured Baghdad in 1638. Although the region contained the port city of Basra, the intensity of the battle for this region implies that it held a greater significance than simply economic access. The territory became a symbol of the struggle for supremacy between Ottoman Sunnism and Safavid Shi’ism. Additionally, the land itself was a strong cultural symbol for both sides. For the Sunnis, Baghdad was the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate for 500 years, and represented the Golden Age that Sunnis wished to perpetuate. For the Safavids, Iraq was home to two of the most revered shrines in Shi’ism; the center of Shi’a theology was in Najaf, and Karbala was the site of Imam Husayn’s martyrdom. Given the significance of the region to both cultures, the battles created sectarian divisions that would arise

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<sup>30</sup> Walter Posch, “A majority ignored: the Arabs in Iraq,” in *Looking Into Iraq*, ed. Walter Posch (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, July 2005), <http://www.iss-eu.org/chaillot/chaillot79.pdf#search=%22posch%20%22looking%20into%20Iraq%22%22> (accessed 6 October 2006), 30.

<sup>31</sup> A. William Samii, “Shi’a Political Alternatives in Postwar Iraq,” *Middle East Policy Council Journal* 10, no. 2 (Summer 2003), [http://www.mepc.org/journal\\_vol10/0306\\_samii.asp](http://www.mepc.org/journal_vol10/0306_samii.asp) (accessed 30 November 2006).

throughout Iraq's history. Even though a majority of Iraqis converted to Shi'ism, the land remained under Ottoman control, and the idea that Sunnism triumphed over Shi'ism (and was therefore superior) entered the narrative of the Sunni identity.<sup>32</sup>

### **3. Governing Structures**

In addition to geographic issues, however, the region's governing policies also contributed to Sunni identity. A key aspect of Sunni identity is based upon the fact that the Mesopotamian region has been ruled by Sunnis since the Ottomans conquered Baghdad. Under the Ottomans, this region was ruled as three separate provinces reflecting the composition of these identity groups. The northern province of Mosul had economic links to Greater Syria and was dominated by Kurds, while the Sunnis in the Baghdad region relied mainly on agriculture and trade with Iran, and the Shi'a in Basra had economic ties to the Persian Gulf and India.<sup>33</sup> Although some intermingling occurred, these areas were relatively homogenous for many years.

The end of World War I brought the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the 1920 British mandate to govern Iraq. Unfortunately, the British officials creating new Arab states from the fallen Empire did not fully consider the impact of the arbitrary boundaries they assigned. In Iraq's case, the British combined the Mosul, Baghdad and Basra regions into a single administrative unit that did not represent a political community in any sense of the term. This new "state" of Iraq constituted one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse Arab regions of the old Ottoman Empire. Forcing the Sunni Arabs, the Shi'a and the Kurds to live under a single government in an arbitrary political construct gave rise to substantial obstacles for stability and governance that still present themselves today.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, the British strengthened the Sunni collective identity in their colonial rule by implementing their standard governing tactics: prop up the minority to suppress and rule the majority. Throughout most of Britain's colonies, this procedure

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<sup>32</sup> William J. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2004), 55-56.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

emphasized the adversarial relationship between the governed identity groups. Under this policy, the minority Sunni Arabs received a disproportionate share of political and military power in modern Iraq, which empowered them to persecute the majority Shi'a population.<sup>35</sup>

While Britain maintained control over many key economic and political decisions, the fact that Sunnis have not been ruled by Shi'a since the Safavid empire forms a key foundation for their modern identity. Eric Davis strengthens this view by pointing to attempts by Sunni elites to shape Iraqi historical memory to benefit their own specific ethnic group or tribal clan. Davis claims that “[t]he traditional Sunni Arab leadership that supported Pan-Arabism fostered a parochial and chauvinistic historical memory *to prevent cross-ethnic solidarity from threatening its historical prerogatives* [emphasis added].”<sup>36</sup>

These actions attempted to reinforce the Sunni collective identity while undermining that of the Shi'a and Kurds. However, collective identities are often consolidated in opposition to other identities. Targeting individuals as part of an identity group creates more solidarity with that identity, so these efforts had the unintended consequence of strengthening the Shi'a and Kurdish identities. Algeria in the 1960s provides an excellent example. The Islamic Salvation Front galvanized the Muslim's collective identity by causing the French to overreact and indiscriminately target their identity group with extreme repression. This ethnic profiling strengthened the collective identity and motivated its members to high-risk action to remedy an unjust situation, and this historical lesson should not be ignored in Iraq. Many Sunni moderates may believe that the answer to stability lies in cooperation with the new government, but continued targeting by Shi'a can easily cause them to sympathize with the more radical Sunnis who are protecting Sunni interests.

The Sunni position of power was most pronounced and brutal during Saddam Hussein's dictatorial regime. On one hand, Hussein strengthened the power of Sunni

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<sup>35</sup> This persecution continued through monarchies and military rulers until the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, and is largely responsible for fueling the Shi'a insurgency led by Moqtada al-Sadr shortly after the U.S. toppled Hussein's regime.

<sup>36</sup> Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 21.

tribes by providing jobs, power and prestige to the Sunni tribes in return for unquestioning loyalty. Although some Shi'a were co-opted into the Hussein government in an effort to secure Shi'a loyalty and keep a close watch on the population, the Sunnis were the major benefactors of power in Hussein's regime.

On the other hand, when the Ba'ath Party rose to power in 1968 the leaders sought to suppress any loyalties other than to the Ba'ath. The Ba'athists succeeded in creating a one-party state and extending Ba'athist influence into all aspects of Iraqi society. As Cleveland explains, "[l]abor unions, student federations, and women's groups all came under party control. The officer corps was also brought within the orbit of the party, and promotion was determined by party membership."<sup>37</sup> As a symbol of the Party's power, in 1977 Saddam formally removed all distinctions between party and state by extending membership in the Revolutionary Command Council to all members of the Ba'athist ruling council.<sup>38</sup> In other words, the Ba'ath tried to replace the disparate identity groups with a single collective identity loyal to the Ba'ath and its leaders.

After the first gulf war and the resulting sanctions, however, Hussein could not afford to provide the government services that bought the tribes' loyalties. At this point, he returned to previous identity constructs to maintain stability: tribal leaders and Islam. This reversal of policy created a patronage system whereby Saddam bought loyalty from the sheikhs and offered more freedom for religious access than he had before 1991.

#### **4. Shared Historical Memory**

Religious, ethnic and geographic divisions, coupled with an entrenched power structure built over an extended period of time, allowed the Sunnis to strengthen a collective identity by creating a shared historical memory. This historical memory created an imagined community in which Sunnis were the rightful superiors over the other groups in the region. The tension between Iraqi nationalism and pan-Arabism presented the modern vestiges of the attempt to create a shared historical memory.

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<sup>37</sup> Cleveland, 409-10.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 410.

Between 1921 and 1958, the political elite in Iraq reinforced the differences between nationalism and pan-Arabism. Because the Iraqi nation was new, pan-Arabists could mobilize the existing historical memory more effectively than the nationalists, and their ability to romanticize the past helped them gain support for the pan-Arab version of Iraq's historical memory. However, this memory was shaped by the Sunni political elite to strengthen their identity, and the Shi'a and Kurds therefore viewed pan-Arabism as another instrument for political, economic and cultural exclusion.<sup>39</sup>

Continuing this effort, the Takriti Ba'ath Sunnis empowered by Saddam attempted to base the Iraqi narrative upon an "historical imaginary [more so] than on an ideological formulation of the contours of the contemporary nation-state."<sup>40</sup> As a key feature of the Sunni identity, this imaginary focused emphatically upon the Arab Golden Age of the Abbasid Empire (750-1258CE), and suggested parallels between past greatness and the magnificence that Ba'athist Sunnis would bring to Iraq. It also provided another example of the ethnicization of Iraqi history and sought to promote distrust among Iraq's major ethnic groups.<sup>41</sup>

### C. THE EFFECTS OF OPPOSITION

One additional aspect of identity warrants further attention. As Schwedler explains, identity is impacted by an individual's position within complex social networks, and different identities can vary in prominence depending on the situation.<sup>42</sup> This gives rise to two important factors. First, identity is cemented in opposition to other identities. For example,

the salience of Bosnian *Muslim* identity...increased dramatically when Bosnians were collectively targeted beginning in 1992. This collective identity did not emerge through ascriptive characteristics or a shared

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<sup>39</sup> Davis, 55.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>42</sup> Schwedler, 4-5.

religion; rather, Bosnians' identity as Muslims emerged in response to extraordinary political circumstances in which their survival as a group of Muslims was at stake.<sup>43</sup>

In this view, the importance of a specific identity changes in response to external factors. More specifically, identities become necessary when a group is opposed by another group in the quest for resources – whether the resource is money, water rights or physical safety – and identities are cemented when threatened by crisis.

Even in modern times, Iraq has experienced crises that cemented the salience of Sunni identity in opposition to the country's Shi'a groups. For example, the 1991 Shi'a uprising in southern Iraq threatened the entrenched Sunni power structure in Baghdad. To many Sunnis, this threat underscored the divide between the two groups and illustrated the benefits of loyalty to the in-group. More acutely, the insurgency raging today is increasingly becoming Sunni versus Shi'a sectarian violence, whereby an individual's safest calculation for survival depends on loyalty to his identity group.

Secondly, this highlights the nature of competing identities. If an individual simultaneously holds several identities, situations can arise that put these identities in conflict with each other. A father may have to choose between meeting his family's needs and fighting in the insurgency, for example. An insurgent may be conflicted over the effectiveness of targeting civilians and the view of the Qur'an on this topic, reflecting competition between his identities as a militant and what he views as a good Muslim. When identified correctly, these competing identities can be leveraged to promote stability in Iraq.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, although the group evokes a religious foundation by calling itself *Sunni*, its current identity is also based upon many secular factors. Geography had a tremendous impact by setting the stage for a battle between Sunni Ottomans and Shi'a Safavids, in which the Sunnis gained and held power for almost five centuries. The British colonist's custom of propping up the minority Sunnis to suppress the Shi'a reinforced the idea that Sunni rule was divinely inspired or blessed. In addition to British

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<sup>43</sup> Schwedler, 4.

practices, domestic Iraqi regimes instituted policies to ensure continued Sunni elites remained in power and ethnicized the Iraqi narrative to emphasize the Abbasid Golden age and minimize the role of Iraq's other identity groups.

Following Saddam's overthrow, however, these Sunnis lost their connections with the power and prestige of the old regime. For the first time since 1638, Iraq's Sunnis did not rule their homeland. In addition to the economic loss of Saddam's patronage, many Sunni tribesmen suffered from loss of income as the Coalition endeavored to enhance stability by eliminating cross-border smuggling. This reversal of fortune strengthened the collective identity further by fostering a desire to regain the Sunni's rightful position in government and society, to restore lost prestige and income, and to protect Sunnis from potential power abuses by the more numerous Shi'a in the new governing system. These grievances will be addressed in the next chapter.



### **III. POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY**

In this chapter, I apply one particular aspect of social movement theory to help explain the emergence of the Sunni insurgency – political opportunity. The structures in place immediately following Iraq’s regime change drastically altered the political opportunity structure of the country and alienated many Iraqis. In particular, Sunnis were forced to cede a measure of power to the Shi’a and Kurds, and the lack of strong governmental control afforded the insurgents an opportunity to mobilize to violently oppose the Coalition and the new Iraqi government.

After a short overview of political opportunity as it pertains to SMT, I briefly review the body of literature regarding this topic in Iraq, reconciling the broad-based structural framework with the specific realities on the ground in Iraq – loss of status, power and income; lack of representation in the new government; and physical insecurity based largely on the fear of violent Shi’a reprisals. I conclude that while non-violent participation was possible for the Sunnis shortly after Saddam’s overthrow, many Sunnis either did not believe this was the case or were threatened to avoid participation in the new government. Therefore, a rational analysis of the situation led insurgent leaders to conclude that violence would best protect their interests.

#### **A. DEFINING POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY**

Doug McAdam, et al., explain that the work of Charles Tilly (1978), Doug McAdam (1982), and Sidney Tarrow (1983) firmly established the link between institutionalized politics and social movements.<sup>44</sup> According to Tilly, opportunity defines the relationship between the group and its external environment. No matter how well organized a group is, it cannot mobilize without the opportunity or freedom to assemble, if only in secrecy.<sup>45</sup>

During this time, however, the Europeans adopted a different approach to political opportunity structures. While Americans examined the emergence of social movements

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<sup>44</sup> McAdam, et al., 2.

<sup>45</sup> Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 7.

based on changes in a system's structure, Europeans tried to explain how differences in political characteristics of nation states affected the success or failure of movements. In other words, Americans wanted to know why movements developed while Europeans wanted to understand why they succeeded. Both aspects, however, are "guided by the same underlying conviction: that social movements and revolutions are shaped by the broader set of political constraints and opportunities unique to the national context in which they are embedded."<sup>46</sup> Combining these frameworks, this chapter addresses both why the Iraqi insurgency arose and what political conditions allowed it to organize and operate.

For this thesis, I define political opportunity as the structures and conditions, both formal and informal, available to a particular group at a specific point in time. As political structures change, or fail to change to accommodate expectations, political grievances may arise. When these grievances are not addressed, a group may begin to organize to resolve the issues. The political space available for a group to organize and operate, or the permissiveness of its environment, is also a function of its political opportunity.

This chapter examines the political opportunity structures that set the stage for the Sunni insurgency, but provides only a brief overview of the specific grievances that motivated the insurgency. One particular difficulty in examining this issue is that a single insurgent may have several grievances that motivates his or her participation, and may profess allegiance to multiple mobilizing structures that fight for distinct goals. To explain this issue more precisely as it pertains to individual motivations, I disaggregate the grievances overviewed in this chapter into more specific grievances and goals in the Mobilizing Structures chapter.

## **B. THEORY AND STRUCTURE**

The literature describing political opportunity varies from macro-level explanations of the causes of instability to very detailed descriptions of how structural concerns affect insurgent perceptions of political opportunity in Iraq's Sunni insurgency.

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<sup>46</sup> McAdam, et al., 2-3.

Generally, this literature can be divided into two groups: rational, which focuses on the relationship between violence and political and economic grievances, such as inequality, poverty, illiteracy or lack of democracy; and cultural, which focuses on the difference between the values and beliefs of terrorists and their targets.<sup>47</sup> Social movement theory provides a model that blends these two approaches, asserting that political opportunity is only one aspect that aids in establishing the causal and procedural links between political grievances and violent collective action.

Beginning at the structural level, Tilly explains that Western powers followed a brutal path towards the stability they enjoy today. He claims that war is absolutely central to state-making, and warfare caused the European states to perform four essential functions that resulted in strong, stable states: eliminating or neutralizing external rivals (war-making), eliminating or neutralizing internal rivals (state-making), protection (eliminating or neutralizing the enemies of their clients, often providing both the threat and the protection), and extraction (acquiring the means to carry out the first three objectives).<sup>48</sup> The implication of this process is a direct challenge to the social contract theory: Western states are more stable than many of today's lesser developed states because they were allowed to fight it out. Borders were created based on the force to defend them and internal rivals were crushed without fear of international intervention.

In contrast, today's Middle Eastern states were never afforded the opportunity to secure their stability through force. Additionally, European states did not have to contend with the effects of globalization. Today, advanced industrialized states have an interest in the resources of Middle Eastern states, and thus an interest in their internal functioning. Therefore, unlike during the formative period of European statehood, in the Middle East intervention from powerful foreign nations suppressed internal uprisings, and most borders were created rather arbitrarily in the early 1900s without regard to social norms or identity groups. Protection and threat were provided by the colonizers, and extractive institutions were organized to benefit the colonizers rather than to ensure

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Mousseau, "Market Civilization and Its Clash with Terror," *International Security* (Winter 2002/03): 27.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime" in *Bringing The State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 181.

state stability. Furthermore, the colonizers often propped up a minority group to administer the population, which increased the impediment to self-governing stability.

Ian Lustic claims that

the system of colonial subordination and externally enforced norms to which nineteenth and twentieth century Middle East was subjected did not allow cross-border warfare by local rulers to effect substantial change in the number, size, or internal regimes of states.

My claim is that these historical sequence-linked differences in the geopolitical context of European and Middle Eastern state system development constitute not the only but the single most important explanation for the contemporary absence of a Middle Eastern great power.<sup>49</sup>

Preventing the rise of a great power is only one symptom of the current geopolitical construct; the same differences in the developmental paths of Western powers and Middle Eastern states are detrimental to internal stability. Just as Alexander Gerschenkron argued that competition from industrialized nations prevented latecomers from achieving industrialization through free market capitalism,<sup>50</sup> latecomers to state-building cannot follow the same path to development as their predecessors in the West. Applying this argument to Iraq, since the creation of the Iraqi state foreign powers have interfered with the violent process of building internal stability, with the consequence of leaving Iraq as an unstable state with rather arbitrary borders encompassing at least three distinct identity groups: the Sunnis, the Shi'a and the Kurds. In this sense, Iraq is a state but not a nation, and this fact necessarily impacts calculations of political opportunity for its citizens.

Throughout his rule, Saddam tried to create the cohesive identity necessary for stability. During the 1990s, he “fostered images of a renascent Iraq ready to exploit its political stability, economic resources, substantial population, and close ties with the Soviet bloc for the benefit of the Arab world as a whole,”<sup>51</sup> but these ambitions were cut short by war with Iran, the American-led coalition in the 1991 Gulf War, and finally

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<sup>49</sup> Ian S. Lustic, “The Absence of Middle Eastern Great Powers: Political ‘Backwardness’ in Historical Perspective,” *International Organization* 51:4 (Autumn 1997): 657.

<sup>50</sup> Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962).

<sup>51</sup> Lustic, 671.

brought to an end by the 2003 invasion that removed Saddam from power. Specifically applied to today's internal conflict, Iraq's insurgents openly claim that the Coalition's imperialist actions to prevent their battle for power are a primary foundation for their perceptions of political opportunity in Iraq. Not only did the Coalition drastically alter the functioning political construct by toppling the regime, but Coalition actions after Saddam's fall directly influenced the opportunity to organize for collective action, both violently and non-violently. In effect, political opportunity for the future of Iraq includes the inability to fight it out to stability as Western powers did.

Furthermore, American decision-makers seemingly believed that Iraqis would welcome the political changes resulting from Saddam's removal and did not plan for sustained, organized violence in opposition to the Coalition's plans. Disregarding the inadequate attention paid to Iraq's disparate identity groups and how each would accept the new structures, many analysts pointed to Germany and Japan as examples of how military force can spread democracy and lead to a stable, functioning government. These examples reflect a tremendous selection bias, however, and Eva Bellin provides outstanding insight into why the political opportunity structures in Iraq are not conducive to such plans:

Germany and Japan began with a set of endowments, many of them anticipated by democratic theory, but others peculiar to the cases' unique historical context and time, that favored democratic outcomes. These endowments are not replicated in Iraq, nor does military occupation guarantee them elsewhere.<sup>52</sup>

Bellin provides several examples of the differences in endowments that limit Coalition efforts to promote stability; three pertain to the discussion of political opportunities. First, Germany and Japan both had industrialized economies and retained post-war human, organizational, and social capital (skilled workers, skilled managers, and social networks). Iraq never achieved such a level of economic development. Second, Germany and Japan were much more ethnically homogenous and enjoyed consensus on national identity and social solidarity, so they had no need for "nation building." Iraq is fractured along ethnic and religious lines, and each groups' view of the "nation" varies.

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<sup>52</sup> Eva Bellin, "The Iraqi Intervention and Democracy in Historical Perspective," *Political Science Quarterly* 119:4 (2004-5): 595.

Last, Germany and Japan had traditions of efficient, meritocratically organized state institutions, and many of these institutions remained in place after the war. In contrast, Iraq relied on Saddam's patronage system, which fell apart with the regime.<sup>53</sup> These endowments necessarily affect Sunni calculations of political opportunity, and explain the structural circumstances that gave rise to Sunni opposition.

After examining such broad-based structural causes of instability, I now narrow the focus to political violence and highlight Michael Mousseau's research: political violence originates from a conflict in the "values and beliefs associated with the mixed economies of developing countries in a globalizing world."<sup>54</sup> He explains that two types of economies are coming into conflict – market economies and clientalist economies. In the West, market economies are

founded in agreement on fundamental principles: how the world should be organized—politically, economically, and socially—and what constitutes proper governmental behavior both internally and externally. When differences surface among market democracies, the discourse is bounded by mutual respect for state rights (equity) and the primacy of international law—just as the domestic political behavior of the governments of these democracies is culturally bounded by respect for individual rights and the primacy of democratic law.<sup>55</sup>

Clientalist economies, by contrast, are based on explicit social linkages, such as kinship and ethnicity, and these linkages render in-groups more important than out-groups. Societies based on clientalist economies are organized hierarchically, with patrons receiving gifts from clients as expressions of loyalty, and in exchange for life-long protection. By implication, these communities are more inward looking than market communities in terms of identity, values, and beliefs. When market values clash with a clientalist society, however, that society's economic norms diverge from prevailing cultural values and beliefs. This causes clientalist linkages to break down, necessarily threatening the patrons' power, but without allowing enough time for market values to permeate society. "During this period of social anarchy," Mousseau explains, "a zero-sum culture may emerge in which strangers pursue their interests without any regard for

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<sup>53</sup> Bellin, 596-7.

<sup>54</sup> Mousseau, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

shared values—market or clientalist.”<sup>56</sup> This period of zero-sum conflict, during the transition from clientalist to market values in society, provides the grievances and often the perceived opportunity for violent political expression.

The Hussein regime possessed characteristics of both modernizing autocracy and a tribal society, but the overthrow and expectation of immediate shift to democracy necessarily caused a clash between the American expectations of a pluralistic society and the values entrenched in Iraqi society, compounded by the fact that Iraqis had no previous experience with democracy or with representative government and societal structures.<sup>57</sup> Steven Metz enhances this argument by stating that, “moving from the psychology of totalitarianism to the psychology of an open society, with its foundations in political initiative, consensus building, and compromise, is a long and tortuous journey.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the struggle between market values of the West and the clientalist values of Iraq’s patronage system causes some groups to lose power, and this loss is viewed as a threat to their political opportunity.

This explains the structure of political opportunity available to Iraqis at the time of the invasion. Iraq was a state ready to be divided by simmering ethnic hostilities but kept in check by an oppressive government, and after the invasion the United States imposed a set of expectations that Iraqis had neither the resources nor the skills to meet. However, these circumstances do not explain the specific grievances of the Sunni insurgents, or why they chose insurgency and terrorist tactics to express their opposition.

### **C. POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY IN IRAQ – GRIEVANCES AND SPACE**

While individual insurgents fight to address many varied grievances, three common themes permeate the insurgent motivations. First, individuals and groups favored by Saddam lost a great deal of status and prestige with his overthrow. In many cases, political power and a source of income accompanied this loss in status. Next, many Sunnis feared that their interests would not be secured in the new government.

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<sup>56</sup> Mousseau, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Jim Ruvalcaba, “Understanding Iraq’s Insurgency,” *al-Nakhlah* Article 7 (Spring 2004), [http://fletcher.tufts.edu/al\\_nakhlah/archives/spring2004/ruvalcaba.pdf](http://fletcher.tufts.edu/al_nakhlah/archives/spring2004/ruvalcaba.pdf) (accessed 11 November 2006): 3.

<sup>58</sup> Steven Metz, “Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq,” *The Washington Quarterly* 27:1 (Winter 2003-2004): 27.

This lack of representation led them to conclude that violence was a more effective method of ensuring that Sunnis had a voice in the new governing process. Lastly, the Coalition's inability to stem the looting that began shortly after Baghdad's capture illustrated to the Sunnis that the Coalition could not protect them from expected Shi'a reprisals. Therefore, fear and physical insecurity dictated that Sunnis arm themselves and prepare for violent action against an impending threat. This section examines each of these grievances in detail.

### **1. Grievances – Loss of Status, Power and Income**

The most acute grievance affecting Iraq's Sunni population after Saddam's fall is the loss of status, power and income. Although Saddam offered some governmental positions to influential Shi'a in an effort to control the Shi'a population, his government favored Sunnis. As a result, more Sunnis than Shi'a tended to be in positions of power. Additionally, after the economic hardships of the Iran-Iraq war and the sanctions following the first Gulf War, Saddam turned to Iraq's tribes to distribute oil rents and control the population. With his fall, these individuals and groups lost their influence over society and government, and this sudden decrease in importance provided a major impetus to regain what they lost. This grievance in particular has a different affect upon each group in the Sunni insurgency, so I will examine it in greater detail in Mobilizing Structures chapter.

However, some commonalities still exist. The most oft-cited examples of Sunni grievances are Ambassador L. Paul Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Order #1, De-Ba'athification of Iraqi Society, and Order #2, Dissolution of Entities. While many strategists would concede that ideological leaders within the Ba'ath Party should not be returned to government posts, Order #1 cut much deeper into Iraqi society. Anyone could be expelled from government employment regardless of whether or not they were involved with the senior structure, including university and grade school teachers. Furthermore, CPA Police Advisor Steven Casteel explains that most teachers joined the Ba'ath Party simply because Ba'athist teachers' salaries were four times



greater than non-Ba'athist teachers, rather than for any ideological loyalty to the party. These indiscriminate cuts were applied across the spectrum of government employment.<sup>59</sup>

Order #1 had three major negative impacts. Most importantly, such indiscriminate cuts unnecessarily stripped the Iraqi government of most employees with the experience needed to govern its society. Without workers, the government could not perform basic services and society descended into chaos. It also removed a large portion of Sunni inputs to government, leaving them with no voice and with few alternatives to violence.<sup>60</sup> Lastly, Order #1 created a large pool of unemployed personnel who began to feel discontent that the newly established Coalition system left them without a means of income.

The unemployment problem became much larger when Order #2 dissolved the military. Upwards of 400,000 Iraqis, many of them young and possessing military experience and weapons, were now unemployed. Most of these Iraqis viewed their service with honor and as a measure of their status, and after the Coalition victory many of them expected to be called back into service to maintain order and help with reconstruction. In stark contrast to their expectations, however, they interpreted Order #2 to imply that the Coalition did not value their participation and that their formerly honorable service was now a disqualifier for government employment. Although Ambassador Bremer claims that Order #2 may be the “single correct decision we made while we were there,” former Director of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance Jay Garner believes that Order #2 was the single event that largely shifted the perception of the Coalition from liberators to occupiers.<sup>61</sup>

The CPA orders had severe economic impacts that were worsened by the policies that followed. Citing security concerns, American contractors largely refrained from hiring local labor during reconstruction, although the inexpensive price of labor imported

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<sup>59</sup> *Frontline: The Lost Year in Iraq*, directed by Michael Kirk, (17 October 2006; Arlington, VA: Public Broadcasting Service, 2006), <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/yeariniraq/> (accessed 11 November 2006).

<sup>60</sup> Thomas M. Gross in *Frontline: The Lost Year in Iraq*.

<sup>61</sup> *Frontline: The Lost Year in Iraq*.

from South Asia certainly played a role in their decisions. Importing labor contributed to the unemployment problem, shunted the local business expertise and possibly increased the illegitimacy of the occupation forces.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, the South Asian workers remitted these earnings to their home countries while American companies expatriated the profits rather than reinvesting into the Iraqi economy. Khalid Medani claims that such economic and political difficulties are the true cause for Iraq's instability, and the struggle takes on a regional or sectarian hue simply because these identities offer more security than supporting the Coalition.<sup>63</sup>

## **2. Grievances – Lack of Representation**

In his exploration into causes of revolutionary movements, Jeff Goodwin concludes that political violence is not simply a response to economic exploitation or inequality, although these provide common grievances, but is “more directly a response to political oppression and violence, typically brutal and indiscriminate.”<sup>64</sup> After Saddam's fall, many Sunnis feared that the new government would exclude them and that Shi'a reprisals would be brutal and indiscriminate. For a short time after the fall, however, Jay Garner's Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance provided opportunities for Sunni involvement in the new governing structures, and Sunnis were officially encouraged to create parties, to participate in both elections and to vote in the constitutional referendum. How did this disconnect between participation and violence occur?

Shortly after major combat operations ended, the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance tried to establish a representative successor to Iraq's government. With White House envoy Zalmay Khalilzad (later Ambassador to Iraq), Garner organized meetings with hundreds of Iraqis of various views and ethnicities to lay the parameters for an interim administration. In May 2003, however, Paul Bremer's CPA was recognized by the United Nations as an occupying authority and the CPA subsumed

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<sup>62</sup> Khalid Mustafa Medani, "State Building in Reverse: The Neo-Liberal 'Reconstruction' of Iraq," *Middle East Report* 232 (2004): 29.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>64</sup> Jeff Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3.

Garner's duties, suspending his political overtures. Bremer then appointed a 25-member Iraq Governing Council (IGC) that would not have sovereignty, and in September 2003 the IGC created a 25-member cabinet to run Iraq's ministries. The IGC and cabinet had only slight majorities of Shi'a and some influential Sunni politicians emerged, illustrating the non-violent participation was possible. Still, many Sunnis still resented the invasion and opposed the US-initiated government.<sup>65</sup>

Sunni participation in the elections is also a contested subject for the insurgents. Only 10 to 15 percent of the Sunni Arab population voted in the January 2005 elections, leaving Sunnis without a voice in the elected government.<sup>66</sup> Before the elections, however, Sunni insurgents implemented counter-election strategy consisting of "attacks against voters, polling centers, election officials and candidates. These actions, combined with open attempts to dissuade Sunni Arabs from voting, largely prevented the Sunnis from participating in the election."<sup>67</sup> Although the insurgents largely succeeded in making the January 2005 election appear invalid to Sunnis, the fact that they resorted to such drastic measures to discourage participation illustrates that many Sunnis were indeed willing to participate in non-violent political compromise in the newly forming government.

Even with this participation, many Sunnis are hesitant to trust the new government. Many believe that the Shi'a and Kurdish factions are controlled by the United States and Iran and that these factions dominate the government, so Sunni interests will not be protected.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, many Sunnis speak of the Shia-dominated United Iraqi Alliance as "the Safavid government."<sup>69</sup> Abuses of power, such as the discovery of secret prisons run by the Shi'a-dominated Ministry of Interior where Sunnis were tortured, fuel the perceptions that the new government is making war on the

<sup>65</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 5 July 2006, <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/68782.pdf> (accessed 11 November 2006), 13.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Eisenstadt and Jeffrey White, "Assessing Iraq's Sunni Arab Insurgency," *Policy Focus #50* (December 2005), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=228> (accessed 11 November 2006): 17.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>69</sup> Vali Nasr, *The Shi'a Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006), 199.

Sunnis.<sup>70</sup> For these reasons, “the Sunni Arab community is deeply divided over whether its future lies with the insurgency, the political process, or a combination of the two.”<sup>71</sup>

### **3. Grievances and Space – The Effects of Looting and Fear of Shi’a Reprisals**

The final major motivation for the insurgency is the fear of violent Shi’a reprisals. Following decades of Saddam’s oppression, the Sunnis feared that the Shi’a were waiting to exact revenge for injustices by Saddam’s forces. In many cases they were correct; accounts of reprisal, whether perpetrated by government-endorsed Shi’a forces or by independent organizations like Moqtada al-Sadr’s forces, are not uncommon.<sup>72</sup> This fear alone is not a sufficient grievance to motivate an insurgency, but placed in the context of the widespread looting that occurred almost immediately after the fall of Baghdad it becomes a more salient issue.

For several days after Coalition forces toppled Hussein’s regime, many of Baghdad’s citizens looted government ministry buildings, stockpiles of basic survival supplies, and even national archives and museums. Ambassador Barbara Bodine describes the chaos following Baghdad’s fall as evolving from looting to unstructured crime, to structured crime, and one “could probably even do a DNA chain to the insurgency. That was the spark.”<sup>73</sup> No authority existed in Iraq at the time to quell the looting and restore order.

While the link between looting and the insurgency is not causative as Ambassador Bodine’s comment suggests, it is a salient link nonetheless. The Coalition’s inability to maintain order highlighted two key issues to Sunni leaders. First, the Coalition was not able to protect them from Shi’a reprisals, so Sunnis needed to mobilize to protect themselves. Second, if the Coalition could not maintain order, then the Sunnis had the political space to mobilize against both the Shi’a and the Coalition. This political space is a necessary condition to insurgency.

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<sup>70</sup> Sameer N. Yacoub, “Shiite Forces Blamed for Sunnis’ Deaths,” *Associated Press*, 29 August 2005.

<sup>71</sup> Eisenstadt and White, 24.

<sup>72</sup> Nasr, 26.

<sup>73</sup> *Frontline: The Lost Year in Iraq*.

Erica Chenoweth's research supports this argument. She posits that instability does not cause such violence, but violent actors simply take advantage of the opportunity. According to her analysis,

the political stability of the existing regime is the most significant factor affecting the origins of terrorism....The essential argument is that the "permissive conditions" of politically unstable regimes inhibit domestic institutional mechanisms that could potentially prevent terrorist organizations from taking root in particular countries.<sup>74</sup>

Although her research specifically describes terrorism, this conclusion remains a valid description of the physical and political space necessary all political violence. Unstable systems, such as Iraq after the Saddam fell, become permissive environments because no agency exists to enforce laws and norms, to hold individuals accountable for transgressions, or even to monitor violent actions. In this environment, insurgents are simply political actors responding to a lack of political order. In short, insurgencies develop only when the political opportunity to organize exists, just as "terrorism develops wherever it can."<sup>75</sup> One important implication of Chenoweth's analysis is that political violence can be expected in transitioning states, regardless of the type of government in transition.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Ambassador James Dobbins, Former Assistant Secretary of State, stated that shortly after Saddam's overthrow, "the Iraqi people were at least open-minded and prepared to work with the United States, and optimistic about the future. And that has largely been lost...."<sup>76</sup> Considering the participation in Jay Garner's first meetings with multi-ethnic and multi-factional Iraqis, and the fact that insurgents felt the need to wage an anti-election campaign as late as January 2005, it is apparent that a portion of Sunnis

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<sup>74</sup> Erica Chenoweth, "Instability and Opportunity: The Origins of Terrorism in Weak and Failed States," in *The Making of a Terrorist* vol 3, ed. James Forest (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 18-19.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>76</sup> *Frontline: The Lost Year in Iraq*.

were willing to participate in the new government. Over time, however, this good will was lost and many Sunnis came to believe that their interests would be best secured by violently opposing the new government.

Explanations of political opportunity structures provide a very important foundation for explaining the emergence of the insurgency in Iraq, but such explanations are not complete in and of themselves. The Coalition's de-Ba'athification regime and the dissolution of the armed forces merely set the conditions and provide the grievances. Authors claiming that these two orders or the Sunnis' loss of status and influence are the causes of the insurgency fail to provide a mechanism for transforming these conditions and grievances into collective action. In this chapter, I have provided the structural and political conditions under which the insurgency rose, from the macro-historical level explaining why Iraq is not a cohesive nation to the three specific grievances that motivate the Sunni insurgents – loss of status, power and income; lack of representation in the new government; and fear of Shi'a reprisals. In the next chapters, I explain how these conditions and grievances are used to motivate the collective action that became the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.

## **IV. MOBILIZING STRUCTURES**

Integral to ending the insurgency is addressing the fighters' political grievances, which can only be done once an adequate categorization of them exists. Understanding the origins and structure of these forces provides a step in the direction of finding a solution to end the violence. I attempt such a categorization in this chapter by applying SMT's concept of mobilizing structures. After a short overview of the theory, I briefly review the literature on the identity of Iraq's insurgents, which varies in the categorization according to origin, ideology, goals and religious views. I found no existing categorization strategy that was both complete and useful for crafting strategies to ending the insurgency. Instead, I present a new model that will provide superior insight into the essential characteristics of the insurgent groups.

The criteria for establishing categories have very important policy implications. Most importantly, groups that are candidates for rapprochement should be targeted with incentives for cooperation, while groups that cannot be co-opted should be isolated and defeated. Further, if candidates for rapprochement are differentiated by goals, it may be possible for the Iraqi government to reduce the insurgency by adjusting policies and appealing to each group based on its goals. Therefore, I distinguish among indigenous secularists, transnational secularists, indigenous Islamists and transnational Islamists. Every major Sunni insurgent group in Iraq fits into one of these categories, and organizing them in this fashion will allow an effective counterstrategy to be created. This categorization facilitates targeted policies for each group according to their particular characteristics.

### **A. THE THEORY OF MOBILIZING STRUCTURES**

According to Charles Tilly, collective action requires four components: organization, mobilization, opportunity, and the action itself. In this framework, organization is the group's structure, and most directly affects its ability to act on its interests, while mobilization is the process by which the group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action. Opportunity defines the relationship between the

group and its external environment, as addressed in the previous chapter. Finally, he defines collective action as individuals working together towards a common goal.<sup>77</sup> Under this framework, this chapter will define mobilizing structures as the structures by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action, including manpower, skills and repertoires. These structures are then used to carry out the collective action, and necessarily influence the direction and tone of the activities and outcomes.

Doug McAdam, et al., adopt a similar approach in defining mobilizing structures. “By mobilizing structures we mean those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action.”<sup>78</sup> They add an important feature to understanding mobilizing structures by submitting that “[i]f institutionalized political systems shape the prospects for collective action and the forms movements take, their influence is not independent of the various kinds of mobilizing structures through which groups seek to organize.”<sup>79</sup> In other words, the essential characteristics present in a movement are necessarily affected by the vehicles, or mobilizing structures, used by that group in the formative stages of the movement. Furthermore, as external forces act upon the movement, these characteristics will adapt over time.

In the context of Iraq, the opposition’s mobilizing structures during the insurgency’s formative period included groups that used institutionalized violence for conflict resolution and political manipulation. These are former military personnel, Saddam’s internal security forces, militant transnational Islamists, and criminals. In part, this structure explains why the opposition turned violent so quickly. With limited exposure to non-violent political resolution, but with years of experience in violent political manipulation, it should hardly come as a surprise that the opposition chose armed conflict to express its political opposition.

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<sup>77</sup> Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 7.

<sup>78</sup> McAdam, et al, 3.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



## **B. APPLYING THE THEORY TO IRAQ**

Shortly after the end of major combat operations in Iraq, Sunni and Shi'a fighters began attacking Coalition forces in small numbers. What was initially a harassment to the Coalition eventually grew into a full-scale insurgency. Over time the Shi'a population was appeased into relative calm by political inclusion in the new government, but Sunni Iraqi attacks have not abated.<sup>80</sup> Today, the Coalition cannot even provide an accurate number of armed fighters in Iraq, but 20,000 seems to be a midpoint range including all types of insurgents. Others number the Sunni insurgents and active sympathizers in the range of 15,000 to 60,000, with even greater numbers of passive sympathizers.<sup>81</sup> Even on the low end of these estimates, the Sunni insurgents have created a permissive environment for hostile actions against Coalition and Iraqi forces that shows few signs of improving in the near term.

As Jeremy Sharp explains, many critics point to the May 2003 decision to disband the Iraqi army, Order #2 – Dissolution of Entities, “as the single most important factor in destabilizing Iraq after the cessation of large scale military operations.”<sup>82</sup> However, Timothy Haugh points out that

It is trite at this point to label the Coalition Provisional Authority policies of de-Ba'athification and disbanding of the Iraqi Army as a cause of the insurgency. Although these policies likely contributed recruits as foot soldiers, it is a certainty that the current suspected leaders of the Sunni groups would have been unwelcome in any future Iraqi society.<sup>83</sup>

According to Haugh, disbanding the Iraqi army did not cause the insurgency but likely had an impact on the mobilizing structures by increasing the number of unemployed persons in a country with no industry and by limiting the potential to use the disbanded

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<sup>80</sup> On 22 February 2006, Sunni insurgents posing as policemen bombed the al-Askariya mosque in Samarra, which contains the tombs of the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Imams. These Imams are the father and grandfather of the Hidden Imam, and the Shi'a believe that this shrine is where the Imam will appear when he returns from occultation. This was considered by many to be a direct attack on the Shi'a faith, and Shi'a retaliated by destroying Sunni mosques and killing influential Sunni clerics. Approximately 500 Iraqis were killed in violence resulting from the bombing. The long-term impact of this attack remains unclear, but pundits claim that Iraqi society appears to be poised on the brink of full-scale civil war.

<sup>81</sup> Cordesman, 8.

<sup>82</sup> Jeremy Sharp, “Iraq’s New Security Forces: The Challenges of Ethnic and Sectarian Influences,” Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 12 January 2006, 2.

<sup>83</sup> Haugh.

soldiers in other capacities supporting Coalition goals. In his view, unemployment provided a major grievance to be addressed, and the insurgency is simply one avenue to remedy the problem for the insurgents. While too many variables exist to empirically link Order #2 with the growth of the insurgency, “the lack of opportunity for unemployed Iraqis has created a market for anti-Coalition activities.”<sup>84</sup> As evidence of this growing market, Haugh cites the 4th Infantry Division Commander, MG Raymond Odierno:

When we first got here (October 2003), we believed it was about \$100 to conduct an attack against coalition forces, and \$500 if you’re successful. We now (March 2004) believe it’s somewhere between \$1,000 and \$2,000 if you conduct an attack, and \$3,000 to \$5,000 if you’re successful.<sup>85</sup>

Since it is unclear whether the insurgency would have occurred without Order #2, one cannot assume that all insurgents are former soldiers or that their grievances stem directly from dismissal and unemployment.

Who then are the insurgents and what are their goals and grievances? Are they open to rapprochement and able to be assimilated into the functioning political discourse in the future? Some general agreement on these issues exists in the literature, but with little precision in categorizing the groups and their goals.

Amatzia Baram explains that profiling Sunni insurgents is difficult because demographic information is fragmented and the rebels are “marked more by their heterogeneity than by their homogeneity,” but some basic categories can be distilled.<sup>86</sup> He categorizes the insurgents by motivation and “identity-based impetuses,” narrowing the field to three groups. The secularists/ideologues include former regime loyalists (FRLs), Ba’athists, Arab nationalists, and the like. These secularists may or may not support Saddam Hussein, but generally want a return of their former power and prestige, and a protection of Sunni status for the future. Tribes form a category of their own, and are defined by loyalty to their traditional tribal structure over ideology, government or religious activist groups. Many of the tribes and secularists are willing to cooperate in a

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<sup>84</sup> Haugh.

<sup>85</sup> Bruce Hoffman, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, June 2004), 12.

<sup>86</sup> Baram, *Who Are the Insurgents?*

new government if their interests are guaranteed. Islamists are Baram's final category, but within this group he defines subsets of "moderate and radical" and "ultra-radical Salafis and Wahhabis."<sup>87</sup>

Secondary to these categories, Baram suggests the insurgents can be divided based upon which groups can be co-opted into the new government. Candidates in the first group include individuals who may lay down their arms if the new government can protect their interests in a fair manner without opening the country to Shi'a domination. Secular/ideological, tribal and moderate Islamists groups generally fall into this category. The second group consists of ultraradical Islamists, former regime officials who have committed crimes against humanity or otherwise think they have no place in the new Iraq, and hardened criminals. This group understands that its interests in no way align with a successful representative government and will not consider rapprochement as a viable alternative to fighting.<sup>88</sup>

After dividing the insurgency into Sunni, Shi'a and foreign terrorists, Timothy Haugh adopts a similar approach. However, he refrains from characterizing indigenous groups as "essentially Sunni," claiming that "[a] better description would be either opposition groups operating in traditionally Sunni areas, or groups representing Iraqis who are no longer in power."<sup>89</sup> The groups do not fit neatly into categories because each one is a complex mix of tribal, religious and Ba'athist influences. Even so, Haugh categorizes the insurgent groups based upon ideology and structural grievances.

Few articles provide an in-depth analysis of this topic in particular, but Mark Steliga provides an excellent analysis of insurgent groups in Iraq. Echoing the general consensus of this body of literature, Steliga clarifies that "it is necessary to understand the Iraqi insurgency as a variety of different concurrent movements as opposed to one monolithic phenomenon."<sup>90</sup> He expands on this heterogeneity by explaining that the disparate groups share only two significant characteristics:

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<sup>87</sup> Baram, *Who Are the Insurgents?*

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Haugh.

<sup>90</sup> Mark Steliga, Lieutenant, USN, "Why They Hate Us: Disaggregating the Iraqi Insurgency" (Masters Thesis, Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, March 2005), 3.

All of Iraq's insurgent groups maintain an interest in expelling coalition forces, which are currently the only major hurdles between the insurgents and their goals of power, wealth, prestige, or ideological victory. In addition, all of Iraq's insurgent groups have taken advantage of Iraq's cities, using them as refuges, making the insurgency a largely urban phenomenon.<sup>91</sup>

With this warning, he divides the insurgency into Sunni, Shi'a and transnational categories, then further subdivides the Sunni insurgent groups into tribal insurgents, FRLs, Sunni nationalists, and Sunni Islamists.

In his view, the tribal groups are concerned with regional power relative to neighboring tribes, while FRLs wish to reestablish the "old guard" in power or prevent the Shi'a from taking power. After the capture of Saddam and many high-ranking Ba'athists, the FRLs became largely inactive and function only as financiers for other groups. Iraqi nationalists simply want to expel the Coalition and reinstate Sunni Arabs as the premier political powers for the country. The indigenous Sunni Islamists form Steliga's final category, and he claims that indigenous Islamists have some fissures with the transnational *jihadists*. Even so, they often provide the cohesion for indigenous secular groups to cooperate with transnational *jihadists*.<sup>92</sup>

Anthony Cordesman provides the final example of categorization that represents the body of literature. He agrees that classifying the insurgent groups is difficult because of the highly sectarian and regional nature of the conflict, but describes the two major groups often used by intelligence, Coalition and Iraqi government experts. First, the native Iraqi Sunni insurgents tend to be primarily nationalists who do not desire regional or global *jihad*, but simply seek the ability to influence events inside Iraq. Their goal is to regain their former power, or at least a "fair share" of the power, and although they may be religious individuals a secular government under Sunni control is acceptable. "Anger, revenge, economic need, opposition to the US invasion and any government that grows out of it or sheer lack of hope in the current system" also motivate individuals in this category.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Steliga, 2-3.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>93</sup> Cordesman, 5.

Cordesman's second category consists of Sunni neo-Salafi insurgents. These groups, especially those led by hard-line figures like the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, fight to establish a regional Sunni puritanical caliphate with no presence of Christians or Jews, and in which other Muslim sects must convert to Salafism or be destroyed. Although many of these groups publicly deemphasize the *takfiri* nature<sup>94</sup> of their ideology by identifying themselves as Iraqi rather than Salafi, some groups actively encourage such sectarian violence.<sup>95</sup>

Cordesman admits that this general categorization has severe limits. For example, determining how many Iraqis support such extremists Islamist insurgents or how many transnationals influence the conflict remains practically impossible. Furthermore, it remains unclear how many members actually support these groups' ideologies and which members simply "act out of anger, misinformation, and/or a naïve search for martyrdom."<sup>96</sup> Regardless of such limits, Cordesman's imprecise categorization represents a popular division of the insurgents between secularists and Islamists.

### **C. BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: CATEGORIZING THE SUNNI INSURGENTS**

Examining the literature as a whole, the two most common criteria for categorization are secular versus Islamist and indigenous versus transnational. However, none of the literature reviewed specifically used these categories to provide a complete picture of the Sunni insurgent groups, and none of the structures were parsimonious. Most importantly, although the current literature provides useful details and some categorization, no author offered an inclusive framework suitable for creating policy and finding solutions to the conflict.

Using these secular versus Islamist and indigenous versus transnational criteria, I offer a categorization that includes every major Sunni insurgent group in Iraq. This framework is parsimonious, easily applied to the policy sector, and will enhance the

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<sup>94</sup> *Takfiri* generally refers to the practice of declaring an individual as a non-believer. As used by Islamic extremists, labeling an individual *takfir* provides religious justification for killing him. Salafists often label Shi'a Muslims *takfir*, which some groups in Iraq use to fuel the sectarian violence.

<sup>95</sup> Cordesman, 5.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

effort to create an effective counterstrategy. A simple chart with a representative sample of groups in each category provides an overview.

	<b>Secular</b>	<b>Islamist</b>
<b>Indigenous</b>	Subset 1 – Ideological (FRLs, Ba’athists, Nationalists, Pan-Arabists)  Subset 2 – Tribes  Subset 3 - Criminals	Domestic Radicals, Salafists
<b>Transnational</b>	Subset 1 – Transnational Criminal Organizations  Subset 2 – Foreign Nations	Al-Qaeda in Iraq Ansar al-Sunna

Table 1. Inclusive Categorization of Sunni Insurgents

For the purposes of this thesis, indigenous means individuals or groups who originated in Iraq and whose motivations and goals lie primarily within the nation-state of Iraq. Transnational groups are organizations that have “sustained continuous interactions with opponents – national or non-national – by connected networks of challengers across national boundaries.”<sup>97</sup> The differentiating characteristic between indigenous and transnational organizations is the target of loyalty; the loyalty of indigenous organization lies with or within Iraq’s boundaries, whereas the loyalty of transnational organizations transcends or ignores Iraq’s national boundaries.

Secular organizations either have no prevailing ideology, or an ideology that lies outside the purview of religion. Islamist organizations define their basic identity by adherence to Islam, and justify any goals in religious terms. Islamist organizations differ in level of radicalism, from moderates to ultraradical Salafis and Wahhabis.

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<sup>97</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 184.

## 1. Group I – Indigenous Secularists

Indigenous Secularists are likely the largest group of insurgents and include any homegrown Iraqi groups that have secular motivations and goals. The first subset comprises insurgents with ideological motivations, such as former regime loyalists, Ba'athists, Iraqi nationalists, and pan-Arabists. Because of the patently different goal of securing tribal power above state power, tribes form a separate subset within this group. Domestic Iraqi criminals generally lack any ideological agenda and form a small third subset in this group.

Similar to Baram's secularist/ideologues group, "[e]conomic, ideological, social and power-based secular interests largely motivate the insurgents belonging to this group."<sup>98</sup> Additionally, Iraq has a large youth population, and thousands of young, unemployed Iraqis have former military experience and access to weapons. With an effective anti-occupation framing strategy, this creates a large recruiting pool for indigenous secularist insurgent groups. Further worsening the problem, Hussein drafted plans prior to the invasion for a partisan insurgency. Immediately after Baghdad fell, these former loyalists began resisting the occupation by using military stockpiles of arms and ammunition and, more importantly, an existing chain of command that transferred directly from the Ba'ath regime into the insurgent networks.<sup>99</sup> In other words, the insurgents were prepared for operations while the Coalition was still basking in the glow of regime collapse.

A few short months after the fall of Baghdad, multiple groups in this category had arisen, such as the General Command of the Armed Forces, Patriotic Front, and Iraqi Liberation Front, composed of former Ba'ath party members, Special Republican Guard units, former state security personnel, Iraqi intelligence personnel, and Hussein's *fedayeen* paramilitary personnel. Baram provides a longer list of such organizations, including al-'Awda (The Return), al-Islah (The Reform), Jabhat al-Muqawama (The Resistance Front), Munazzamat al-Tahrir al-'Iraqiyya (The Iraqi Liberation Organization), and Kata'ib Salah al-Din (Saladin Phalanx).<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Baram. *Who Are The Insurgents?*

<sup>99</sup> Steliga, 39-42.

<sup>100</sup> Baram. *Who Are The Insurgents?*

These ideologues have grievances and goals that are generally straightforward and thoroughly discussed in the literature: anger and frustration over lost status and income, fear of Shi'a supremacy in the new government, and a desire to protect Sunni interests or return to a Sunni-dominated power structure in Iraq. Initially, many of them were fighting either to return the Ba'athist regime to power or to create such a hostile environment that the Coalition would withdraw, but this goal became increasingly unrealistic. As one fighter explains, "I did my military service in the Republican Guard, in the Tawakalna ala Allah division. Now we are not defending Saddam Hussein, but we are defending our city, Falluja."<sup>101</sup>

Most members of this subset are open to rapprochement. With such straightforward goals, many of these individuals can be assured that their interests will be protected, that the Shi'a will not dominate the new government, and that they will not be targeted by the Shi'a-controlled state security agencies. If these ideologues perceive that such policies are successfully implemented, many will eventually lay down their arms in hopes of a stable, functioning homeland.

Tribes and tribal interests form the second subset of this group. Although Saddam's Ba'athist ideology demanded the dissolution of any political allegiance in Iraq other than his party, he rarely held true to this doctrine. Even though he slowly embraced tribalism and its symbols from the beginning of his reign, his interaction with Iraq's tribal history increased tremendously in the 1980s and 1990s. Rather than eliminating sheikhs as symbols of political allegiance, Saddam manipulated them into loyalty by increasing their prestige and using the tribal system to distribute the state's petrodollars, and then began sharing state power by tribalizing the state security services and even referring to the Ba'ath party itself as a tribe on at least one occasion. Saddam even illustrated the apparent superiority of tribal customs over state law when he supported the honor killing of his sons-in-law by their tribe, even though he had pardoned them.<sup>102</sup> With tribalism

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<sup>101</sup> Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), "Iraqi & Arab Mujahideen Tell Al-Arabiya TV of the Wait List for Martyrdom Operations and Other Methods of 'Destroying the Americans'" Special Dispatch Series no. 1040 (6 December 2005), <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=iraq&ID=SP104005> (accessed 13 October 2006).

<sup>102</sup> Amatzia Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-96," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 1 (February 1997): 10-15.



remaining such an entrenched idea in Iraqi collective identity, falling back upon this traditional structure in a time of such crisis seems inevitable.

This subset closely parallels the ideologues in regards to membership and grievances, as Gilles Kepel explains:

The recurrent insurrection in the Sunni triangle northwest of the capital was perhaps understandable. The fallen dictator had lavished payments upon this stronghold to ensure the loyalty of Arab Sunnis, who make up barely seventeen percent of the Iraqi population.<sup>103</sup>

Many tribes relied on these payments for income and prestige, and with Saddam's fall these payments ended. Furthermore, tribes often earned income by cross-border smuggling, but this has become much less lucrative as Coalition troops attempt to cut off all unregulated cross-border movement. Additionally, Iraqi culture values the "tribal warrior tradition" and many tribesmen are honor-bound to avenge the death of a relative; in this case, Coalition success on the battlefield ignites tribal aggression and begins an unending cycle of violence.<sup>104</sup> As Steliga explains, "America's complete disregard for Iraq's tribal structure and its political significance lead to the rise of multiple disjointed Sunni tribal insurgencies, intent on jockeying for power and adamant about not being disenfranchised by Iraq's new government."<sup>105</sup>

While the tribes' grievances closely resemble the ideologues, their goals include protecting tribal power relative to neighboring tribes and other groups in the region, rather than supporting any functional national government. On the contrary, any state authority will necessarily take power from tribal interests, so many tribal sheikhs have entrenched interests in thwarting a power greater than their tribe and its allies. Furthermore, their small size and the lack of cohesion for any broad-based tribal goals make this group extremely difficult to target with an effective counterinsurgency strategy. Even so, many tribes are still candidates for rapprochement if the coalition can find a solution that allows the tribe to save face without avenging a blood feud, and still addresses the tribe's grievances regarding loss of income, power and prestige.

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<sup>103</sup> Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 200.

<sup>104</sup> Baram. *Who Are The Insurgents?*

<sup>105</sup> Steliga, 6.

The final subset of indigenous secularists is the criminal element. Immediately before the invasion, Saddam released approximately 200,000 prisoners from Iraq's prisons.<sup>106</sup> These criminals blended with the local gangs, tribes, Islamists and newly formed insurgent groups, creating an environment of social lawlessness. Since the Coalition has been largely ineffective at instilling law and order to large sections of Iraq's cities, criminals have been free to disrupt the lives of everyday Iraqis and pressure them to comply with insurgents and gangs.<sup>107</sup> The criminals do not have grievances that parallel those of ideologues or tribes, but they are interested in profiting from the unstable situation. Since an orderly society would likely impinge on this goal, their interest lies in disrupting civil authorities and perpetuating an environment of chaos. In general, hardened criminals are not open to rapprochement because an empowered national government would likely return them to prison.

## **2. Group II – Transnational Secularists**

Transnational secularists are divided into two subsets: criminals and agents of foreign nations. Transnational criminal organizations closely resemble indigenous criminal elements regarding grievances and goals, but they are generally involved in cross-border smuggling of supplies to insurgents. Agents of foreign nations also have no political grievances inside Iraq, but their goal is to secure their own nations' interests by manipulating Iraq's internal politics. Members of this group are generally not involved in insurgent operations, but support the insurgents with supplies and funding. This group is completely averse to rapprochement and has no role in a new Iraqi government, although foreign nations may find that a stable Iraqi government serves their interests.

## **3. Group III – Indigenous Islamists**

Although the majority of insurgents and most of the support for the insurgency appear to be secular in orientation, this aspect of the conflict is largely overshadowed by Islamist extremists, both indigenous and transnational. Internal to Iraq, Islamism dates to

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<sup>106</sup> Ahmed Hashim, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq" (Newport, RI: US Naval War College Publishers, 4 June 2004), 13.

<sup>107</sup> Steliga, 39.

the mid-1940s when the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) began operating in Iraq to restore traditional Islamic values to society, spread the religion's message, and relate this message to contemporary issues. During the 1950s, the MB denounced all forms of westernization, secularism, nationalism and Marxism, the ruling elite, and its parties and supporters. The Brotherhood blamed all of society's problems on the perceived deviation from Islam, and these ideas resonated with a segment of Iraq's population.<sup>108</sup>

Although Hussein's Ba'athist ideology nearly eliminated Islamism from the country, strains from the Iran-Iraq War, Operation DESERT STORM and the sanctions beginning in 1991 forced Saddam to loosen the restrictions on Iraq's mosques. At this point, many young Iraqi men thought that the Ba'ath Party had lost its ideological coherence and eschewed the Party's original ideas in search of an alternate belief system. Since the strains had partially removed Saddam's ability to maintain his grip on the mosques, mosques "were the only institution, apart from the tribes, relatively immune to regime and party control. They became the natural place for people in search of an alternative to the Ba'th to pass their free time."<sup>109</sup> To a large degree, this resulted from Saddam's destruction of Iraq's civil society. With no viable social networks besides the Party, Iraqis had few options for alternative expression and the mosque welcomed them into the Islamic social network. As Ayyash al-Kubaysi of the Muslim Ulema Council explains, the mosque basically reared many of Iraq's young men.<sup>110</sup>

During the 1990s, mosques began rebuilding the civil society that Saddam's policies and the international sanctions had worked so diligently to destroy. Some organizations began promoting veiling and seclusion of women as well as other Islamist means of controlling daily life in Iraq. After the regime fell in 2003 and Iraq's society fell into chaos, Islamist associations began cementing their control over Iraqi society. Some mosques quickly began vehemently objecting to the US occupation and organizing demonstrations after Friday prayers. Shortly after the regime collapsed, US forces clashed with insurgents in the Sunni city of Fallujah. Fallujah's defenders represented

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<sup>108</sup> Basim al-Azami, "The Muslim Brotherhood: Genesis and Development," in *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologues: State, Religion and Social Movements in Iraq*, ed. Faleh Abdul-Jabar (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 166.

<sup>109</sup> Baram, *Who Are The Insurgents?*

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

several smaller groups, including secular Ba'athist or nationalist organization, but most claimed Islamic attachments. At this point, however, averting democratic rule was not the objective; the insurgents simply wanted power over their city.<sup>111</sup>

The most radical Islamists are the Salafis and Wahhabis who label any secular regime as apostate and *jahiliyya*, referring to the period of ignorance before God revealed Islam to Muhammad. Two characteristics of this group are particularly disturbing. First is the desire to ignite a full-scale sectarian conflict between Iraq's Sunni and Shi'a. It appears that the Salafis believe that a full-scale civil war will force the Coalition to withdraw its troops, leaving them to conquer the Shi'a and impose a puritanical Islamist caliphate. Secondly, these extremists groups "differ from other Sunni insurgents in their willingness to use violence against noncombatants and the innocent and in their willingness to use violence against other Muslims. They are far more willing to use extreme methods of violence, like suicide bombs...."<sup>112</sup> These tactics, and the collusion with transnational Salafi groups like al-Qaeda, have caused the Islamist extremists to capture worldwide media attention and dominate the information arena of the insurgency.

Much like the indigenous secularists, the indigenous Islamists' grievances and goals are relatively straightforward and easily understood. The most radical of the Islamists decry apostate regimes and see democracy as an affront to God's sovereignty, so they see no role for themselves in a representative form of government. As such, their goal is to replace any US-installed government with a puritanical Sunni regime, and they are decidedly not candidates for rapprochement. More moderate Islamists may be drawn into a representative government if they can be assured that this secular government will operate in accordance with the Qur'an.

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<sup>111</sup> Kepel, 220.

<sup>112</sup> Cordesman, 6.

#### 4. Group IV – Transnational Islamists

Many insurgents pointedly assert that indigenous Iraqis comprise the bulk of the fighting force, regardless of religion.<sup>113</sup> Indeed, most Coalition estimates and journalists claim that foreign fighters, or transnationals, make up only about ten percent of Iraq's insurgents. These transnationals are responsible for a large portion of the most lethal attacks in Iraq, however, and they have established relative superiority over the information operations aspects of the conflict. These two facts allow the transnationals to capture much more media attention than their numbers suggest.

Although all Islamists believe that religion should be the defining feature of government, and that a puritanical Sunni-oriented regime should govern, transnational Islamists differ from Iraq's indigenous Islamists in two important ways. First, transnational *jihadists* received their ideological indoctrination outside of Iraq, so their beliefs do not always coincide with those of Iraq's indigenous organizations. On the whole, Iraq's Islamists tend to hold more liberal views than transnational varieties, which may allow for more compromise between groups. However, collusion between Iraq's indigenous groups and the transnational Islamists has contributed to the rise of Salafism in postwar Iraq.<sup>114</sup>

Secondly, indigenous Iraqis tend to be more concerned with installing a pure Islamic regime in Iraq first, whereas transnational Islamists see Iraq as merely one point of departure for the creation of a regional or global caliphate. Ayman al-Zawahiri confirms this goal in a 2004 letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, in which he outlines the stages of the Iraqi conflict. The first stage is expelling the Americans from Iraq, followed by establishing an Islamic caliphate over as much Iraqi territory as possible. In the third stage, Zawahiri counsels Zarqawi to "extend the *jihad* wave to the secular countries neighboring Iraq," because

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<sup>113</sup> For an example, consider the following statement by Sheikh Zafer Al-'Ubeidi, given to a television reporter during a battle in Fallujah: "Just as the enemy recruited 35 of the world's countries to occupy Iraq, we have the right and the honor [to recruit] Arab fighters. We are connected by the destiny of our Arab identity and Islam. But the [Arab volunteers] do not have a leading role. They had the honor of participating, but most of the fighting was carried out by Iraqis, and of Falluja in particular."

Quoted from MEMRI, "Iraqi & Arab Mujahideen Tell Al-Arabiya TV of the Wait List for Martyrdom Operations and Other Methods of 'Destroying the Americans.'"

<sup>114</sup> Steliga, 49.

the mujahedeen must not have their mission end with the expulsion of the Americans from Iraq, and then lay down their weapons, and silence the fighting zeal. We will return to having the secularists and traitors holding sway over us. Instead, their ongoing mission is to establish an Islamic state, and defend it, and for every generation to hand over the banner to the one after it until the Hour of Resurrection.<sup>115</sup>

One very important distinguishing factor between the Islamists and secularists lies in the type of goals espoused by these groups. Whereas secularists tend to promote “negative goals” of preventing the Iraqi government from asserting its power, and have not espoused a cohesive ideology or structure for their own governing vision, the Islamists do have a “positive goal” of an ideal government they are prepared to implement. In this regard, they are the group that appears to be most successful at performing the four functions outlined by Charles Tilly: eliminating or neutralizing external rivals (war-making), eliminating or neutralizing internal rivals (state-making), protection (eliminating or neutralizing the enemies of their clients, often providing both the threat and the protection), and extraction (acquiring the means to carry out the first three objectives).<sup>116</sup> If the Islamists can perform these functions, they are likely to be seen by Iraq’s population as legitimate rulers, much like many Afghans supported the Taliban even if they disagreed with the governing principles.

According to Fawaz Gerges, evidence shows that al-Qaeda has established an operational base in Iraq under the name Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, composed of a coalition of militants from Jaish Ansar al-Sunnah and al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad. These groups appear to maintain separate paramilitary units but coordinate joint operations. This group, until recently led by hard-line Salafist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, has taken credit for some of the deadliest attacks against Iraqi collaborators, as well as international attacks in neighboring countries.<sup>117</sup>

Cementing the relationship that secured al-Qaeda’s operational base in Iraq in late 2004, Zarqawi proved himself and his group as lethal combatants in the *jihad*. Although

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<sup>115</sup> Tilly, “English Translation of Ayman al-Zawahiri’s Letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi,” 12 October 2005, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/006/203gpaul.asp> (accessed 23 August 2006).

<sup>116</sup> Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime.”

<sup>117</sup> Fawaz Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 250-3.

he entered Iraq before the invasion with only a few dozen fighters, he built an operational base that proved capable and durable despite several US attacks on his organization.<sup>118</sup> Gerges also points out that American and Iraqi estimates claim that Zarqawi's organization employs about 1,000 Arab fighters, but his Jordanian biographer, who presumably has better access to Zarqawi's organization, places the number at 5,000 full-time fighters supported by a network of 20,000 loyal followers.<sup>119</sup>

On June 7, 2006, however, two American F-16s destroyed Zarqawi's safehouse near Baquba in an air raid, and Zarqawi died from his wounds shortly after the attack.<sup>120</sup> Analysts are still debating the impact that Zarqawi's death will have for the Coalition effort in the Iraqi insurgency. Cordesman claims that regardless of government actions in the coming weeks, Zarqawi's death will have a positive impact because Zarqawi is the only figure in the Iraqi insurgency that has captured the world's attention. Indeed, Islamist organizations inside Iraq and around the region immediately began congratulating his organization for Zarqawi's martyrdom. What remains to be seen, however, is whether or not the Coalition can eliminate Al-Qaeda's operations in Iraq with the loss of its leader. Perhaps without Zarqawi's leadership, what remains of his organization will moderate and assume a more Iraqi character. Regardless, Cordesman posits, "One thing is clear, most of the insurgency will not be affecting [sic] because Al Qa'ida is a highly visible and extraordinarily brutal cadre within a much larger group of different insurgent movements."<sup>121</sup>

To summarize the transnational Islamists, their grievance remains apostate regimes governing Muslims, and their goal is a regional or global caliphate under puritanical Sunni rule. These groups despise any attempt at negotiation with the Coalition or the new Iraqi government, and even kill Iraqi citizens who collaborate with these forces. As such, transnational Islamists in Iraq are not candidate for rapprochement.

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<sup>118</sup> Gerges, 250-53.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>120</sup> *BBC News*, "Iraqis hail Zarqawi killing," 8 June, 2006, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/5059494.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5059494.stm) (accessed 11 June 2006).

<sup>121</sup> Cordesman, 3-4.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the literature exploring mobilizing structures in Iraq's Sunni insurgency is varied and complex, but only agrees on a few general issues. Gathering sufficient demographic data to accurately categorize insurgent groups continues to be a challenge, and the disagreement over the proper level of aggregation illustrates this. Even so, Iraq's Sunni insurgent groups can be described as indigenous secularists, transnational secularists, indigenous Islamists or transnational Islamists. Every major Sunni insurgent group in Iraq fits into one of these categories, and organizing them in this fashion will allow an effective counterstrategy to be more easily created. For example, under this framework most secular and many moderate Islamist organizations are candidates for rapprochement, while most criminal and ultraradical Islamist organizations have no interest in cooperating with the new Iraqi government. The following chart concisely summarizes the current status of the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.



		<b>Representative Membership</b>	<b>Grievance</b>	<b>Goals</b>	<b>Open to Rapprochement?</b>
<i>Group I</i> Indigenous Secularists	<i>Subset 1</i>	FRLs, Ba'athists, Nationalists, Pan-Arabists	Loss of status, power, prestige, income	Return to Sunni- dominated power structure	Yes
	<i>Subset 2</i>	Tribes	Loss of status, power, prestige, income; Fear of Shi'a- dominated govt	Protect tribe's security and power	Yes
<i>Group II</i> Transnational Secularists	<i>Subset 1</i>	Hardened Criminals	Rule of law threatens profits	Profit, instability	No
	<i>Subset 2</i>	Other nations	Instability threatens security at home	Security for home regime	No
<i>Group III</i> Indigenous Islamists	-	Domestic radicals, mosques	Apostate regimes	Sharia and Islamist regime for Iraq	Moderates: possible  Radicals: No
<i>Group IV</i> Transnational Islamists	-	Al-Qaeda, neo-Salafists	Apostate regimes	Sharia for regional or global caliphate	No

Table 2. Expanded Categorization of Sunni Insurgents

Furthermore, the major mobilizing structures available to Sunnis during the initial effort to address their grievances included groups with no experience in representative or non-violent conflict resolution. While many of Iraq's mosques are no doubt peaceful, Islamic extremists offered funding and resources for Iraqis who would support their views, and Saddam's former security forces institutionalized violence for conflict

resolution and political manipulation. The fact that these particular violence-prone structures were in place to address Sunni grievances as they arose increased the chances that the Sunnis would turn to violence instead of political compromise with the new government.

## **V. FRAMING IN THE SUNNI IRAQI INSURGENCY**

Collective identity, grievances and mobilizing structures are necessary conditions for a sustained social movement, but these conditions are still not sufficient to explain why and how these identities are able to mobilize a population for collective action. Collective identities exist to some degree in every society, but not every society experiences violent social movements like the Iraqi insurgency. Likewise, identity groups in many societies experience severe grievances, such as political exclusion and indiscriminate repression, but these grievances do not evolve into social movements to resolve them. What accounts for this?

The concept of frames and framing offers one explanation. In this chapter, I show how framing applies to the Sunni insurgency in Iraq. I then identify three general frames that resonate with the historical foundation of Sunni identity in Iraq – foreign occupation, army as arbiter of politics, and worldly power as a symbol of God’s favor – and categorize recent public statements by Sunni insurgents into these three framesets.

### **A. FRAMING THEORY**

A frame is “an interpretive schema that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environment.”<sup>122</sup> Social movement theorists use frames to capture a multitude of social processes, but a frame’s basic function is to provide a lens through which to interpret life.<sup>123</sup> These frames can be created, manipulated and contested to serve the needs of a social movement. When used to influence an identity group, however, the frame must be closely aligned with existing beliefs of the group; it must resonate with the group’s collective identity. Without this resonance, the frame will not be effective. Coupled with grievances, an effective framing strategy offers one portion of the sufficient explanation for why some identity groups choose to mobilize for collective action.

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<sup>122</sup> David Snow and Robert Benford. Quoted in Goodwin, et al., 6.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

Quintan Wiktorowicz also offers four framing strategies that Iraqi leaders have used throughout history: exaltation, vilification, credentialing and decredentialing. Exaltation occurs when leaders attempt to convince the frame's targets of the inherent superiority of the movement's particular ideals, goals, principles or similar concepts. Leaders use vilification to demonize the opponent's ideals, goals and principles. For example, Islamic fundamentalists frequently exalt the social order of the Rashidun while vilifying the secularism of western globalization. Credentialing is used to persuade the targets that the movement and its leaders are worthy of their participation and following, and that only their leaders possess the ability to resolve the grievances. Decredentialing is the opposite; it aims to remove the perception that the opposition's leaders deserve the targets' support.<sup>124</sup> Using the example of Islamic fundamentalists again, other fundamentalists are generally credentialed as worthy of leading society, while secular westerners or non-Muslims are portrayed (or framed) as inferior and unable to govern a moral society. Each of these framing strategies can be seen throughout Iraq's history and in the current insurgency.

More appropriately, David Snow and Robert Benford describe three types of frames necessary for recruitment into social movements. First, diagnostic frames attempt to convince a target that a social problem exists and that it must be addressed. Next, prognostic frames recommend strategies, tactics and targets that will address the grievances. Last, motivational frames encourage the targets that they should become involved with the movement in order to resolve the problem.<sup>125</sup> This framework has more explanatory power in determining how a movement coalesces from a simple grievance into motivating a population to violent collective action. Each of these frame types is present in the Iraqi insurgency today.

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<sup>124</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Framing Jihad: Intra-Movement Framing Contests and al-Qaeda's Struggle for Sacred Authority," *International Review of Social History* 49 supp. 12 (December 2004): 159.

<sup>125</sup> Goodwin, et al., 6.

## **B. FRAME #1: FOREIGN OCCUPATION**

The insurgency in Iraq has many facets and many disparate goals, even within the Sunni identity group. No clear political platform has been expressed by the insurgents as to what Iraq would look like under their rule. As Steven Metz and Raymond Millen explain, however, the insurgent groups share one theme in common: the “primary foundation of the ideology of the Iraqi insurgency is opposition to foreign rule.”<sup>126</sup> The available literature on framing in the Iraqi insurgency reaches a broad consensus that most messages fall under this frame. Although the specifics of each author’s categories differ, they all have a common thread of opposition to foreign occupation. Timothy Haugh’s three categories are subsets of this frame, for example. Baram describes messages appealing to Iraqi patriotism and pan-Arabism, encouraging the opposition to cooperate to overthrow the Coalition, and while Cordesman categorizes based on religious or secular justification, but admits that a majority of the messages call for resistance to and expulsion of the Coalition and its goals.

Similar to Cordesman’s categories, Metz and Millen explain that nationalism plays a role in this resistance, but rule over Muslims by non-Muslims is also seen as a direct confrontation with the Qur’an. This opposition and the accompanying anti-Americanism are the only framework present in the insurgency. Therefore, Islamists use this frame to provide religious grounds for resisting the occupation, such as aversion to rule by infidels or the impiety of democracy, while secularists provide imperialist arguments or point out the failings of the occupiers to provide basic government services. Both groups’ actions support these frames, and at this point, they simply want to show the Iraqi people that US occupation forces cannot govern.<sup>127</sup> Although most identity groups would object to foreign rule, this objection alone will not evolve into a cohesive independence movement without an effective framing strategy to convince participants that high-risk violent action is necessary and promises the possibility of success. In this instance, the insurgents have provided a diagnostic frame that foreign occupation is Iraq’s

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<sup>126</sup> Steven Metz and Raymond Millen, “Insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan: Change and Continuity,” (Ft Leavenworth, KS: US Army War College, 2003), 10.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

most significant problem, and the prognostic frame posits that violently targeting the Coalition will result in an end to the occupation.

Encouraging the broad-based anti-Coalition frame in Iraq performs some valuable functions for the insurgents. While not all-encompassing, pan-Arabism and Iraqi patriotism are two deep-seated emotions within the country, and pan-Arabism extends beyond Iraq's borders. Framing the struggle in such terms "provides a respectable ideological legitimacy to the effort to return the Ba'thi regime to power or to return the Sunni Arab community to a position of supremacy through other means."<sup>128</sup> Thus, the secular insurgents have found an appealing emotion that supports their prognostic frame of returning them to governmental power. Encouraging pan-Arabism also "holds a promise of financial, political, and military support from the Sunni Arab world, especially from the Gulf States, who object to any growing Shi'i influence."<sup>129</sup>

Even though broad consensus exists on this frameset, the messages released sometimes bring to light fissures within the insurgent ranks. In this case a framing contest occurs in which two groups attempt to convince the target audience of their vision's superiority. As one notable example, Usama Bin Laden does not encourage conflict between the Shi'a and Sunni population since this drains energy and resources from the fight against the Americans. Although his Salafist views hold that Shi'a are not truly Muslims, he calls for the population to set aside any sectarian, ethnic or ideological differences until the Americans have been defeated:

The Iraqi who is waging jihad against the infidel Americans or Allawi's [former prime minister Ayad Allawi] renegade government is our brother and companion, even if he was of Persian, Kurdish, or Turkomen origin. The Iraqi who joins this renegade government to fight against the mujahedeen who resist occupation, is considered a renegade and one of the infidels, even if he were and Arab from Rabi'ah or Mudar tribes.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Baram, *Who Are The Insurgents?*

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Gerges, 257.

This conflict also played out within al-Qaeda's own organization. Ayman Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's ideological leader, sent a letter to Zarqawi, the commander of Al-Qaeda in Iraq<sup>131</sup>, praising his efforts at jihad but chastising him for driving a wedge between Iraq's Sunni and Shi'a communities.<sup>132</sup>

In this way, leaders of much of the Iraqi insurgency illustrate that throwing off the bonds of occupation is more important at the moment than religious differences, akin to the Maoist mantra that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." This enhances the prognostic frame that only Muslim cooperation will accomplish this mission, and also provides a motivational frame because Zawahiri is extending a temporary olive branch to Iraq's other identity groups. Inclusion into the struggle is a strong motivator, especially for minorities worried about their future in a new governing system.

As previously stated, an effective frame must resonate with its target's collective identity. Resistance to foreign occupation became a theme in the Iraqi identity almost immediately after WWI, when the Ottoman's decentralized system of governance was replaced by the British attempt to enforce centralized governing institutions. Shortly after the British administration began, Iraqi tribes of the Euphrates initiated an uprising in 1920 that lasted several months and cost as many as 10,000 Iraqi lives, 450 British soldiers and £40 million. William Cleveland posits that "even though the rebellion was not a self-consciously nationalist movement, it was inspired by anti-British sentiments and became enshrined in Iraqi national mythology as the first symbol of the new state's rejection of foreign rule."<sup>133</sup>

This national mythology provides a strong foundation for the frames used by Iraq's Sunni insurgents today. For example, Sunni opposition (both violent and non-violent) promotes a decredentialing frame by associating the U.S. with colonial

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<sup>131</sup> Al-Qaeda in Iraq appears to adopt several other names as well, such as Al-Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers, Al-Qaeda Jihad Organization in Mesopotamia, etc.

<sup>132</sup> "English Translation of Ayman al-Zawahiri's letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

<sup>133</sup> Cleveland, 205.

domination and illegitimacy in the Arab world, which taints any Coalition project in Iraq regardless of its potential to improve the country.<sup>134</sup> Consider the following statement from the Islamic Army in Iraq:

When the infidel Americans and their allies became weak and the burden became unbearable, they decided to rescue their remaining dignity by using so-called democracy in order to rule over us using our own people. It is well-known that the meaning of democracy is ‘rule of the people’, but their decisions are not true to this infidel concept. Moreover, they impose whatever they like in the name of democracy, this democracy that gives cover to occupation and tyranny.<sup>135</sup>

This statement clearly portrays an attempt to frame the U.S. as unfit to govern Iraq, as untrustworthy, and as tyrannical colonists. However, it also provides insight into the struggle between Sunni and Shi’a identity groups in Iraq.

Identity groups play very salient roles in how the new government will operate. When the Hussein regime fell, Sunni status plummeted relative to the marked increase of the Shi’a groups. At the time of the Islamic Army of Iraq’s statement, the governing structures put into place by the Coalition clearly institutionalized this change,<sup>136</sup> and a framing contest ensued between the Sunnis and Shi’a over the legitimacy of the new Iraqi government. Sunni groups “warned that the elections were ‘farical and un-Islamic’ and threatened to punish those who participated. On the other hand, the leading Shia cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, issued an edict that called voting a ‘religious duty similar to prayers and fasting,’ and stated that abstention from voting ‘constitutes disobedience of God Almighty’.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Bellin, 603.

<sup>135</sup> *Global Terror Alert*, “The Islamic Army in Iraq on the Upcoming Elections,” 13 January 2005, <http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0105/islamicarmy0105-2.pdf> (accessed 6 October 2006).

<sup>136</sup> The recent elections ushered in a government viewed as legitimate by nearly all Shi’a and Kurds, but free and fair elections were nearly impossible to guarantee inside the Sunni triangle. Therefore, most Sunni Arabs do not grant legitimacy to the new government. For more on this, see Baram, *Who Are the Insurgents?*

<sup>137</sup> Andrzej Kapiszewski, “The Iraqi Elections and Their Consequences: Power-sharing, a Key to the Country’s Political Future,” in *Looking Into Iraq*, ed. Walter Posch (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, July 2005), <http://www.iss-eu.org/chailot/cha179.pdf#search=%22posch%20%22looking%20into%20Iraq%22%22> (accessed 6 October 2006), 15.



### C. FRAME #2: ARMY AS ARBITER OF POLITICS

Aside from the military conquests that have installed rule by force in most of the world's nations at some point in their histories, Sunni army units have been the final arbiter in Iraq's politics since the beginning of the country's independence. In order to understand this, it is important to first examine the historical role that Iraq's military played for the Sunnis. During the Ottoman Tanzimat, the government commissioned the 6<sup>th</sup> Army Corps in Iraq. This elevated Baghdad's status in the empire from an unimportant posting on the fringes to an integral position in the bureaucratic administration. More importantly for Iraqi identity, it also brought educational reforms that allowed Iraqis to join the Ottoman army, travel to Istanbul for education, and return to Iraq for duty. These military and civil service positions offered Iraqis prestige, a regular income and opportunity for advancement in the Ottoman government.<sup>138</sup> Socially, the military became an avenue of social mobility for poor Sunni families. An education from Istanbul became a highly desirable asset in Iraqi society and many future civil and military leaders started their careers there.<sup>139</sup> This illustrates that although Iraqis already carried identities with loyalties to Sunnism, tribe, family and region, they also began to participate in a new collective identity based on Ottoman values.

The sultan attempted to craft this officer corps into a political force loyal to him personally, but the Iraqis resisted this effort. As with other constructed identities, the officer corps' unity of membership rested on shared experiences and professionalism, but this particular identity's loyalty lied with its other members rather than with the political force that provided these experiences and instilled the professionalism. This would have a tremendous impact upon Iraqi society in the coming years, and "the creation of the new Ottoman officer corps as a distinct entity superseding political loyalties would outlast the empire itself, disintegrating as a whole but regrouping its members in the new states (especially Iraq) created after the war."<sup>140</sup> To further enhance the Sunni identity in contrast with the Shi'a, the Ottomans maintained a policy of recruiting coreligionists into

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<sup>138</sup> Walid Khadduri, "Social Background of Modern Iraqi Politics" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1970), 38-42. Cited in Reeva S. Simon, "The Education of an Iraqi Ottoman Army Officer," in *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, ed. Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih and Reeva S. Simon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 151-52.

<sup>139</sup> Simon, 151.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 156.

positions of power, so Sunni Arabs (and to a lesser extent, Sunni Kurds) dominated the officer corps. This also highlights the Shi'a clergy's desire to minimize contact with the Ottoman administration, and the Sunni denial of Shi'a patriotism demonstrated in two major conflicts against the British.<sup>141</sup>

Over time, the Ottomans began shifting the locus of identity away from Islam and inclusive "Ottoman-ism" towards their Turkish identity, in effect ostracizing the Arabs and politicizing the Iraqi army. As Iraqi officers began to join secret societies and read the works of liberal Ottomans calling for equality of all under Ottoman rule, they demonstrated a greater loyalty to their professional and local identities than to the Ottoman identity. Once the British separated Iraq from the Ottomans, however, the Iraqi military retained the professional identity and the accompanying social networks and politicization that would play an important political role after the British mandate was instituted.<sup>142</sup>

This professional identity had two significant impacts on the Sunni army officers. First, the initial Iraqi monarch installed by the British (King Faysal from the Arabian peninsula) filled out his civilian and military staffs with Sunni officers who had returned to Iraq from Ottoman posts. The direct transfer of this existing identity network into the Iraqi political system consolidated the Sunni officers' power. By the end of the decade, these officers had become the political elite in Iraq.<sup>143</sup> Secondly, the army became the arbiter of politics in Iraq. King Faysal maintained Iraq's government with excellent mediating skills, but after his death in 1933, Iraq's politics degenerated into a power struggle among the political elite. This infighting, coupled with the tight circle of political power, disaffected many segments of Iraq's population.<sup>144</sup> Young military officers comprised the most prominent members of the opposition. These Sunni officers regarded themselves and their army units as true symbols of the new Iraqi nation, and they were eager to assert their influence in Iraq and abroad. In 1936, the army stepped in to resolve the issues with a coup staged by General Bakr Sidqi; this brought the army

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<sup>141</sup> Davis, 57.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 157-161.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>144</sup> Cleveland, 209-11.

firmly into Iraqi politics. Six more coups between 1936 and 1941, after which the army converted to civilian leaders rather than keeping control for themselves, cemented the military's position as the final power broker in the Iraqi political system.<sup>145</sup>

This key aspect of Sunni officer identity, army as arbiter of politics, is played out in framing contests today. With the fall of the Hussein regime, many Ba'athists and regime loyalists lost prestige and status, and believed that their nation similarly suffered a decline in status. These groups are mainly secular, although they cooperate with the Islamic radicals when interests coincide. Playing on the historical identity of Sunni army units embodying the country's image, they used a credentialing frame to portray the insurgency as an attempt to fulfill their role as rightful arbiters of politics by defending the country from unjust rule.<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, after Hussein's fall the Coalition simply released the military with no attempt to maintain unit cohesion or accountability. This oversight offered a tremendous boon in mobilizing structures and resources, as many of these groups and often their associated arms and equipment translated directly into insurgent organizations.

In today's insurgency, the connection between this frame and historical identity is less defined than others because Saddam's army and security forces have been disbanded. However, the spirit of the national army is present in many of the insurgent groups, both Islamist and secular, as they submit that they hold the key to the nation's honor and will rightly resist the occupation using violent means. For example, al-Qaeda in Iraq released a video on April 25, 2006, showing Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi with masked fighters, firing an automatic weapon, and showing mujahedin firing newly acquired missiles. This video spoke of Iraq's honor, framing the struggle as an occupation that can only be resolved through the use of military tactics. In many videos and statements such as this, Zarqawi and others attempt to reinforce their positions as military protectors who will restore Iraq's honor.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Cleveland, 209-11.

<sup>146</sup> In this case, unjust rule coincided with the decredentialing frames against the foreign occupiers and the new Shi'a-dominated government.

<sup>147</sup> MEMRI, "New Video by Al-Qaeda Commander in Iraq Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi" Special Dispatch Series, no. 1149 (26 April 2006), <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=iraq&ID=SP114906> (accessed 6 October 2006).

More pointedly and in line with Iraq's recent history, Saddam's security services used personal violence against the population as a tool for political manipulation, and many of the insurgency's messages fall into this category. Therefore, although the previous security organizations do not exist, the insurgent groups have adopted the role and tactics that coincide with those of the predecessor organizations. Most anti-collaboration messages fit into this category; the insurgents convey the message that democracy will not save the country, but their violent struggle will, and they threaten death for simply cooperating with the new government. For example, Bin Laden circulated two letters in Iraq that "condemned and sentenced to death as an apostate any Iraqi Muslim who collaborated with the US occupation or sought to establish democracy...."<sup>148</sup>

This reinforces the notion that institutionalized violence against an individual is an appropriate means to influence society, just as the army has done throughout Iraq's history; these organizations are vying to be the final arbiters of Iraq's politics by using military means. A simple but obvious example is the restrictions against participating in the elections that took place in the Sunni triangle. Not only did the insurgents threaten to kill collaborators, but they also posted signs warning Muslims that the "elections are a legitimate target for Jihad fighters operations [sic]" and to stay away from polling centers "for your own well-being."<sup>149</sup>

#### **D. FRAME #3: WORLDLY POWER DEMONSTRATES GOD'S FAVOR**

Part of the Sunni identity is based upon geography and the struggle for supremacy between the Shi'a Safavids and the Sunni Ottomans. Just as Max Weber described Protestants' view of worldly success as demonstrating God's favor,<sup>150</sup> the Ottoman victory was seen by many as symbolizing God's approval of Sunnism by granting them

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<sup>148</sup> Kepel, 238.

<sup>149</sup> MEMRI, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq: The Drafters of the Iraqi Constitution and Those Who Support Them Are Infidels Who Must Be Killed" Special Dispatch Series, no. 962 (19 August 2005) <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=iraq&ID=SP96205> (accessed 6 October 2006).

<sup>150</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Virginia: University of Virginia American Studies Program hypertext, 2001), 7.

worldly power over neighboring Shi'a. This tradition continued throughout the Ottoman era and until the Coalition overthrew Hussein in 2003, and some Sunnis equate Sunni rule with worldly power.

Mark Juergensmeyer provides a foundation for understanding this aspect of the conflict by defining "cosmic war" as the "metaphysical conflicts between good and evil" that "transcend human experience."<sup>151</sup> A struggle framed as cosmic war "enlivens the religious imagination and compels violent action."<sup>152</sup> Cosmic war is more symbolic than pragmatic, finds moral justification for violence in a religious imperative, and "operates on a divine time line with victory being imminent but not in this lifetime."<sup>153</sup> In Juergensmeyer's view, "Islamist...networks have placed their struggle against secularism, perceived Western domination, and the United States, in a cosmic context."<sup>154</sup> In other words, the struggle between U.S. occupation in Iraq and a return to Sunni rule takes place on a metaphysical battlefield between Good and Evil as much as it does on the streets of Baghdad.<sup>155</sup> If Sunnis lose power in Baghdad, they are suffering God's disfavor and must work to regain it. This frame resonates most strongly with Muslims whose faith forms a central aspect of their identity than with secularists, but this does not mean it resonates only with fundamentalists. However, it provides a very clear example of exaltation and vilification by pitting their cause (Good) against the U.S. objectives (Evil). Extending this logic, their leaders are credentialed because they represent the good and holy, while the U.S. represents the evil and secular. More importantly, it serves a prognostic function, prescribing resistance to occupation as the path to restoring God's favor, and a motivational function as all good Muslims should work towards God's approval.

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<sup>151</sup> Juergensmeyer, 149.

<sup>152</sup> Gregory F. Treverton, Heather S. Gregg, Daniel Gibran and Charles W. Yost, *Exploring Religious Conflict* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2005), <http://www.rand.org/publications/CF/CF211/> (accessed 7 March 2006), xi.

<sup>153</sup> Treverton, et al., xii.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Of note, the frames utilized by both sides in a framing contest necessarily influence each other. The Coalition's frames often adopt the same metaphysical tone of "freedom vs tyranny" and "us versus them" displayed by the insurgents.

As with other examples, this cosmic frame must resonate with the basic identity, and Iraq has a history of using religion to address grievances. This trend was greatly amplified when the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) began to crystallize its ideas for Iraq in 1945. True to the Muslim Brothers' philosophy, struggles were placed in the "cosmic war" frame of good versus evil. The MB's major purpose was to restore traditional Islamic values to society, spread the religion's message, and relate this message to contemporary issues. During the 1950s, the MB's activities were characterized by an uncompromising denunciation of westernization, secularism, nationalism and Marxism, the ruling elite, its parties and supporters, and attributing society's problems to the perceived deviation from Islam by these ideologies and groups. Moreover, "the Muslim Brothers did not consider themselves as a political party but a genuine and new trend. They saw their mission as bigger than that of a political party and their role equally involving political, social and intellectual endeavors."<sup>156</sup> This exemplifies an attempt to use religion and God's favor in credentialing and decredentialing frames.

Furthermore, the MB utilized the diagnostic, prognostic and mobilizing frames outlined by Snow and Benford. As Basim al-Azami explains,

"[t]he Muslim Brothers opted for a political Islamic party on the grounds that political action was both a religious and national duty, that the nature of Islam demanded organized action, that leaving 'un-Islamic' parties unchallenged in the political arena was a fatal mistake, and that Islam as a faith required propagation and promotion through organized action."<sup>157</sup>

This type of framing resonated with a segment of Iraq's population, and these views have gained popularity in the last decade. The Ba'ath party's objective of creating a one-party state nearly destroyed Iraq's civil society, affecting the MB and communists alike, until sanctions in 1991, when Hussein was forced to loosen the restrictions on the mosque. The sanctions affected his ability to provide some basic government services, and he utilized

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<sup>156</sup> al-Azami, 166.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 168.

tribes and Islamists to substitute. As more Muslims were free to examine these issues, the frame once again began to resonate.<sup>158</sup>

In today's insurgency, this frame that worldly power demonstrates God's favor is most commonly used by Islamists. The most radical Islamists are the Salafis, and many subscribe to Sayyid Qutb's framing of apostate regimes as *jahiliyya*, referring to the period of ignorance before God revealed Islam to Muhammad. This diagnostic frame posits that the problems with society arise from secular rule. In Qutb's tradition, society's members have a duty to remove such regimes from power, violently if necessary, and end the *jahiliyya*. Qutb's prognostic frame claims that the imposition of a pious regime and Sharia law will bring the population closer to Allah's will. In general, these frames take the form of credentialing and exalting Muslim fighters, claiming that God will show favor upon the Muslims by granting them worldly power. Likewise, they decredential and vilify the infidel Crusaders for their heathen customs, asserting that God will not allow them victory over Muslim lands as long as the mujahedin remain pure.

This frame's purpose is to make the practical calculations of power appear to be religiously justified. In any representative government, the Sunnis are likely to cede a large measure of power to the Shi'a and Kurds, and this will weaken the transnational Sunni power base. Therefore, insurgents must justify their positions ideologically, and the transnationals in particular must justify their existence and actions in Iraq. The following statements provide examples of messages in this frame, with the framing types added in italics following each section.

1. Al-Qaeda in Iraq's "Department of Indoctrination" released a magazine titled "The Crest of the Summit of Islam" (commonly used to designate jihad), which contained an article discussing the organization and its aims in Iraq.

Why do we carry out operations in Iraq against the Americans and their collaborators in the military and the police? The goal is:

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<sup>158</sup> For more information on the effects of repression on framing, see Asef Bayat, "Islamism and Social Movement Theory," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 6 (2005): 891-908. He claims that an "effective framing strategy would require, first, a political opportunity to allow effective communication and, second, the means to carry out such communication" (903). The MB's message likely suffered under Hussein because "[r]estricted political opportunity and lack of resources are likely to limit the effectiveness of consensus mobilization" (903).

- 1) In order to please Allah, who commanded [to fight the] Jihad and to repel those who attack lives and [women's] honor and property and to expel them from Iraq - the land of the Caliphs. [Credentialing]
  - 2) In order to redeem the honor of our brothers and the chastity of our sisters and the innocence of our Muslim children, [all of whom] have been ravaged by the Americans and their Shi'ite collaborators in the brigades of treachery [a reference to the Shi'ite Badr Brigades, which is the military wing of the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq] and the party of Satan's mission [a reference to Al-Ja'fari's Hizb Al-Da'wa party]. [Vilification]
  - 3) In order to make the light of the Caliphate shine once again from Baghdad, the capital of the Caliphate, so that it will spread the light of justice and prosperity around the world, as things used to be in the time of Harun Al-Rashid. [Credentialing, Prognostic]
  - 4) In order to kill those whose character has become impure and who has joined the ranks of the infidels in their fight against the Muslims in Iraq, that is, members of the Iraqi army and the police and spies, who strengthen the Americans and help them to commit crimes and to rape our sisters in the Abu Ghraib prison and other places...<sup>159</sup> [Decredentialing, Vilification]
2. The Shari'a Court of Al-Qaeda in Iraq will act in accordance with Allah's decree, and will kill anyone who appoints himself partner to Allah and drafts a constitution of falsehood by whose laws people will act in matters of livelihood, life and death, honor, and domestic and foreign policy. [Decredentialing]

Allah said: 'Fight them until there is no more *fitna* [civil strife] and the religion is only Allah's; but if they desist, then surely Allah sees what they do' [Koran 8:39]... The goal of our struggle is to eradicate the [danger] of *fitna* that lies in the heretical modern constitution. We will fight it by argument and by communiqués, and also by sword and spear – because the constitution is a false religion and its drafters and those who promote it are apostates [*murtaddoon*]...<sup>160</sup> [Prognostic, Credentialing]

3. On August 3, 2005, Islamist message forums posted an audio recording titled "The Constitution – Religion of Infidels," by Sheikh Abu Hamza Al-Baghdadi Al-Iraqi, head of the Shari'a Committee of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which read:

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<sup>159</sup> MEMRI, "The Iraqi Al-Qa'ida Organization: A Self-Portrait" Special Dispatch Series, no. 884 (24 March 2005), <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=countries&Area=iraq&ID=SP88405> (accessed 6 October 2006).

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., "Al-Qaeda in Iraq: The Drafters of the Iraqi Constitution and Those Who Support Them Are Infidels Who Must Be Killed."



There is no doubt that one of the important things for which America came [to Iraq] is to establish the principles of appealing to a law besides the law of Allah. It has turned the tyrannical [Arab] rulers into a tool in its hands so that they can implement the principles of its constitution upon the land of Islam... [Decredentialing]

The drafting of the constitution is a very grave act, which contradicts monotheism and is against the religion of Allah. He who drafts the constitution is making himself equal to the Lord of Heaven and Earth. A mortal cannot make laws for the living side by side with Allah, because lawmaking is one of the [exclusive] attributes of the Lord, and only tyrants and rebels compete in this with Allah... The crime of whoever makes himself a lawmaker alongside Allah is no less than the crime of Pharaoh and Nimrod... [Vilification]

Islam is the Shari'a of Allah, and we are waging Jihad for the sake of preserving it and implementing it....<sup>161</sup> [Credentialing]

One additional aspect of this frame is the inclusion of Iraq into a larger struggle for Muslim supremacy. This theme permeates al-Qaeda's releases, with Bin Laden characterizing Iraq as a key battleground in a "third World War," which the 'Crusader-Zionist' coalition started against the ummah" and citing Iraq as a "golden and unique opportunity" for the global jihadists movement to engage and defeat the United States and spread the conflict into neighboring Arab states, including Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestine-Israeli theater."<sup>162</sup> Zawahiri extends this mission into Iraq in his letter to Zarqawi:

...the mujahedeen must not have their mission end with the expulsion of the Americans from Iraq, and then lay down their weapons, and silence the fighting zeal. We will return to having the secularists and traitors holding sway over us. Instead, their ongoing mission is to establish an Islamic state, and defend it, and for every generation to hand over the banner to the one after it until the Hour of Resurrection.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> MEMRI, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq: The Drafters of the Iraqi Constitution and Those Who Support Them Are Infidels Who Must Be Killed."

<sup>162</sup> Gerges, 251.

<sup>163</sup> "English Translation of Ayman al-Zawahiri's letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

Zarqawi continues this frame from inside Iraq with his statements, including the April 25 video:

When the Crusader enemy entered Iraq, it intended to gain control over the [Islamic] nation, and to strengthen the state of the sons of Zion, from the Nile to the Euphrates. But Allah has given the *mujahideen* sons [of the nation] the strength to face the cruelest Crusader campaign, invading the lands of the Muslims. They have withstood this invasion for more than three years...

My dear nation, we in Iraq are but a stone's throw away from the place of the Prophet's ascension. We are fighting in Iraq, but our eyes are set upon Jerusalem, which will only be restored to us through the guidance of the Koran and the support of the sword. Allah's guidance and support suffice.<sup>164</sup>

## E. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I applied the social movement theory concept of framing to aid in understanding the motivations for Sunnis to mobilize to violent collective action. The three major frames used by insurgent groups – foreign occupation, army as arbiter, and worldly power – reflect the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames outlined by Snow and Benford, along with the exaltation, vilification, credentialing and decredentialing frames defined by Wiktorowicz. These frames resonate with the population only because they tap into the collective Sunni identity, constructed through the religious split with the Shi'a, the impact of geography, governing practices and shared historical memory created by the Sunni regimes.

Recognizing these lessons may provide policy-makers with new intervention points to bring an end to the violence in Iraq. Even with the attempt to create a monolithic Iraqi identity, Sunni or otherwise, competing collective identities have a history of prompting governmental changes. This process may provide some insight into understanding today's struggle for primacy. As I explained, the future of the insurgency depends not only upon addressing the political grievances of the population, but also upon the opposition's ability to frame the issues in such a way that the population feels compelled to participate in high-risk, violent collective action. In short, the survival of

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<sup>164</sup> MEMRI, "New Video by Al-Qaeda Commander in Iraq Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi."

the insurgency depends on its leaders' ability to sell their frames to the populace. This recognition of the Sunnis' collective identity and how insurgents craft an effective framing strategy should inform how Coalition forces can create a competing set of frames that will resonate with the Sunni insurgents, and constructing these favorable frames is a critical step to bring stability in Iraq.

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## VI. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have shown that the mere existence of distinct identity groups in the same region is not sufficient cause for violence. Political grievances, such as the loss of status, income and representation resulting from disbanding Iraq's military, merely provide a necessary condition; grievances alone do not explain sustained high-risk collective action. By utilizing three of social movement theory's basic concepts, however – political opportunity, mobilizing structures and framing – I have provided a sufficient explanation for the emergence of the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.

Decreasing political opportunity, in the form of lost status, power and income; lack of representation in the new governing structures; and fear of violent Shi'a reprisals provided the grievances to spark the insurgency. Rampant, unanswered looting demonstrated the Coalition's lack of control over the physical space necessary for violent confrontation. With these conditions in place, many Sunnis turned to the existing mobilizing structures that could best address their grievances – militant Islam, largely relying on foreign networks, resources and funding, and the newly dismembered military. These networks possessed effective skill sets in violent political manipulation, but little experience in democracy and non-violent conflict resolution. Finally, these networks framed their violence in terms that resonated with the population – anti-occupation, army as arbiter of politics, and worldly power demonstrating God's favor. Tapping into the Sunnis' shared historical memory to use these concepts as frames, insurgent statements defined the problem as rule by *kufir* occupiers or Shi'a (prognostic frame), provided a solution to the problem in violent resistance (diagnostic frame), and motivated support by directly linking the Sunni identity group's future to the insurgency (motivational frame). Taken together, decreasing political opportunity, existing mobilizing structures with violent repertoires, and effective anti-*kufir* framing provides a much more salient explanation for Iraq's Sunni insurgency than arguments founded on a clash of civilizations or some metaphysical struggle between good and evil.

With this new analysis in mind, what lessons can be drawn from Iraq's insurgency for future conflicts? First and foremost, despite framing contests by a conflict's stakeholders, such conflicts are rarely about religion. As Vali Nasr explains,

To Western eyes, Muslim politics is defined by Islamic values. Politics may look for truths in religious texts, but it will always do so from within a context that is not purely religious. People read, understand, and interpret their sources of sacred meaning in relation to the hopes and fears that define their daily lives.<sup>165</sup>

More specifically, "history and theology may establish the identities of rival groups; but the actual bones of contention are far less likely to be religious ideas than matters of concrete power and wealth doled out along communal lines."<sup>166</sup> Regardless of insurgent claims, for the Sunnis in Iraq these communal lines include geography, shared historical memory, and historical governing policies and power structures as much as any religious distinctions.

In future conflicts, then, the first step to finding a peaceful solution must include a realistic look – beyond press statements and media hype – at the groups involved. What criteria actually form the groups' boundaries? What provides the cohesion? How broadly will the groups advocating violence be able to draw support? In 2003, the Coalition assumed that only a few "pockets of dead-enders" comprised the resistance,<sup>167</sup> when the aggrieved group involved actually included a very large percentage of Iraq's population, both Sunni and Shi'a.

Next, a realistic look at the political opportunity landscape should define the stakes. In Iraq, loss of status, power and income; lack of representation in the new government; and physical insecurity were very real threats to all Sunnis, regardless of previous positions in Iraq's government. After the Coalition Provisional Authority

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<sup>165</sup> Nasr, 29.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>167</sup> *Associated Press*, "Rumsfeld blames Iraq problems on 'pockets of dead-enders,'" 18 June 2003, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2003-06-18-rumsfeld\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2003-06-18-rumsfeld_x.htm) (accessed 18 November 2006).

implemented the first two orders, many Iraqis viewed “de-Ba’thification” as “de-Sunnification” in disguise.<sup>168</sup> Clearly, these grievances were more inclusive than a few pockets of dead-enders.

Simply falling back on clash of civilizations arguments implies that the conflict will occur regardless of specific grievances and alleviates the responsibility of improving the groups’ situations. This is not the case; social movement theory shows that addressing an individual’s grievance is likely to remove the motivation to mobilize for high-risk action like an insurgency. Again, Vali Nasr explains:

[Sectarian identities] matter to society and politics, but the conflicts that they animate are due to the lopsided distribution of resources and power that have benefited one sect at the cost of another. Over time the Shi’a-Sunni conflict can be brought under control only if the distribution of power and resources reflects the demographic realities of the region.<sup>169</sup>

Therefore, in the future planners should look beyond the mere existence of identity groups in conflict and examine the actual grievances of the groups involved. What grievances do each of the stakeholders have in common? Which of these grievances can be addressed and which cannot? What will happen if the grievances are not addressed? Just as the Sunni-Shi’a conflict will not be brought under control until a fair distribution of power and resources is reached, future conflicts will continue to erupt as long as grievances exist.

Also under the heading of political opportunity, what political and physical space is available to each group? In the future, the US should be very clear about the messages it sends regarding mobilizing space, both political and physical. In 2003, the CPA increasingly convinced the Sunnis that they had very little political space to participate non-violently, while the looting illustrated that they not only had the physical space to mobilize violently, but also the physical need to mobilize to fend off Shi’a reprisals.

After identifying the groups and grievances, planners should examine how the groups will mobilize to address them. Understanding that groups will mobilize if the space is available, an important lesson from SMT explains that aggrieved groups first

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<sup>168</sup> Nasr, 198.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 252.

look to networks and structures that already exist in their societies, and that the mobilizing structures chosen necessarily affect the tone of the resistance. In Saddam's Iraq, very few mobilizing structures existed, and even fewer had repertoires of non-violent conflict resolution. With this knowledge, predicting that a disbanded military would provide both grievance and mobilizing opportunity would not have been difficult.<sup>170</sup>

In future conflicts, planners attempting to prevent violence must first ensure that non-violent avenues are available to voice grievances, and that these avenues have a reasonable expectation of adequately resolving the grievances. When such avenues are not feasible, the structures likely to be utilized must be identified. Rather than offering wholesale an organized, trained and equipped violent mobilizing structure and expecting the group to refrain from mobilizing, planners should encourage non-violent structures when possible. If violent mobilization has already coalesced, however, the analyst must determine which groups are candidates for rapprochement, divide these groups based on grievances, and target each group individually.

Lastly, framing offers some valuable lessons for future conflicts. First, insurgents do not automatically gain the population's support. Support must be earned over time, and large segments of populations in conflict tend to remain neutral until one side gains the advantage.<sup>171</sup> During this time, insurgents must not only begin addressing grievances (often by providing basic government services) but must also sell their viewpoints to the population. This highlights an intervention point for the Coalition to influence the population. However, simply countering a particular message is not sufficient; planners should examine the function of the message – prognostic, diagnostic or motivational – and craft a counter-message that fulfills the identified function. At times, this means counteracting the message; other times, it could simply redirect the logic of the message and co-opt the original frame. This must be done realistically, however. A flawed policy will remain a flawed policy no matter how press reports spin it, so the planners must

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<sup>170</sup> To be fair, some members of the Coalition, such as Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance Director Jay Garner, did express discomfort with the potential destabilizing consequences of the CPA's first two orders. (*Frontline: The Lost Year in Iraq*.)

<sup>171</sup> Eisenstadt and White, 4.



illustrate to the population that actual grievances are being addressed rather than trying to convince them that a flawed policy is in their best interest.

The second lesson of framing combines competing collective identities with framing contests. Lumping disparate groups into a single category, like failing to separate insurgents with no future in the new government from Iraqis who were simply unsure of their future, shows an alarming lack of precision that will inevitably lead to inadequate policies. In reality, identity groups are rarely monolithic blocks acting in complete unison. At any given time, an individual has internalized various collective identities, with differing degrees of salience and loyalty to each one.<sup>172</sup> Unfortunately, the Coalition has yet to capitalize on this and its political maneuvering in the hearts and minds campaign has been characterized by misunderstanding, misapplied frames and misdirected messages. Applying the historical identities in this study to a thorough understanding of the current competing subsets within the Sunni identity may highlight framing contests between the actors. These contests will highlight fissures within the identity group. These fissures can then be exploited so each group will be targeted with customized incentives for compliance with US objectives and disincentives for countering those objectives.

In conclusion, I have illustrated that the Sunni insurgency in Iraq is not a clash of civilizations or a religious battle, but a secular conflict based upon specific political grievances and explained by predictable factors that can be applied to future conflicts. While the conflict in Iraq will surely rage for some time to come, and may even be only one facet of a larger Sunni-Shi'a struggle for dominance across the region, one point still provides hope. Eventually, just as with Protestants and Catholics during the Reformation, this conflict will exhaust itself and "the majority of Shias and Sunnis will settle for a political order that they can share – not dominated by one or the other, theologically or politically – and that represents everyone's social, economic, and political aspirations."<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Schwedler, 4.

<sup>173</sup> Nasr, 28.

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